

## Federal agents seize medical marijuana at Clearlake dispensary

Contributed by Elizabeth Larson  
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CLEARLAKE &dash; Federal officials conducted raids on several medical marijuana dispensaries around Northern California on Wednesday, including one in Clearlake. {sidebar id=81}

Ken Estes' Holistic Solutions on Olympic Drive was the site of an enforcement action by Drug Enforcement Administration agents, accompanied by the Lake County Narcotic Task Force.

The Clearlake dispensary, along with other dispensaries Estes manages in San Mateo and Richmond, as well as the homes of his managers and grow sites in Oakland, San Leandro and Humboldt County, were targeted, according to a statement from California's chapter of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML).

Lt. Mike Hermann of Clearlake Police confirmed that the raid took place, but said the department wasn't directly involved. DEA, he said, notified the department that their agents were in town for the operation.

One Clearlake Police officer who is on the Lake County Narcotic Task Force was present, Hermann said.

The Lake County Narcotic Task Force referred questions about the Wednesday action to DEA.

A brief statement issued by the DEA to Lake County News confirmed that an "enforcement operation" had taken place, but added that all documents relating to it were under court seal.

"Searches were conducted at several locations throughout the Bay Area and Northern California," DEA Special Agent in Charge Javier F. Peña said in the statement. "Items of evidentiary value were seized from these locations. No arrests have been made and the investigation is ongoing."

Dave McCullick, whose D&M Compassion Center has been in Clearlake for the last two years, said his business partner, Matthew Ward, witnessed the DEA at Estes' business in the early afternoon.

Lake County News was unable to reach Estes Thursday. McCullick said Holistic Solutions has been in Clearlake for three years, and in its current location on Olympic Drive for less than a year.

California NORML and McCullick called what took place at Holistic Solutions a "smash and grab" &dash; where agents take all the operation's cannabis and patient records, along with any money on hand or in bank accounts.

"The last couple of years when they've been doing the busts, people aren't arrested or even charged," McCullick said.

McCullick said there's no rhyme or reason to why certain dispensaries are targeted, and the DEA hasn't indicated why they pursue some rather than others. Based purely on manpower, McCullick said he doesn't believe DEA can get to all of the state's numerous dispensaries.

The California NORML statement noted that Estes "believes that the raids were initiated on the tip of a former associate who was facing a lengthy federal sentence on cultivation charges."

McCullick said his business hasn't had any issues with the DEA.

Nor has he had any problems with Clearlake Police, according to McCullick, who said he has worked to keep the lines of communication open with Police Chief Allan McClain as well as with other local officials.

However, last October, the Federal Bureau of Investigation seized nearly 100 marijuana plants from his business partner's home in Lakeport. Ward, who was at the compassion center when the raid took place, maintained that the plants were part of a legal medical marijuana grow.

A few months earlier, in August 2007, the FBI seized 30 mature plants from the Lakeport home of Howard Holtz, as Lake County News reported.

McCullick pointed to the ongoing friction between state and federal law, which he says is placing both medical marijuana patients and law enforcement in the middle. Dispensaries like his, he said, are just trying to give patients access to good, safe medicine.

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