

The Apple Campus of Weed: PowerPlant Park creates jobs in Richmond

By Michael Giotis

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Sometimes this crazy cannibalistic cannabis industry, overrun by excise taxes, underwater in bottoming harvest pricing and awash with out of state investment, can still inspire with its potential for impact and social good.

Such an example is sprouting up in Richmond, as if from the ground itself. The impressively conceived PowerPlant Park looks at the opportunities of the industry as a chance to make an impact as much as money. This really isn't always the case.

In the mists of history before I took up this column, I worked as a business designer for the pioneering cannabis consultancy 421 Group, where I worked on every kind of brave new cannabis company.

Just as I don't believe cannabis is the magic potion to cure all ailments, so my experience has led me to believe that the industry is not the magic cure for all that ails capitalism that some had hoped it might be.

Chatting with Richard Trieber, founder/president of PowerPlant Park, one gets the feeling that just maybe some of the hype around cannabis' positive impact on communities might just be finding fertile ground.

The 18.8 acre complex will house multiple commercial units, most run by PowerPlant Park itself, some available for lease to licensed cultivators, manufacturers, etc. Trieber said, "It's not one of these, you know, building jungles. It's a park. It's like Yosemite." Indeed, PowerPlant Park is a beautifully designed, multi-purpose, multi-license facility along the waterfront adjacent to Point Pinole, which, upon opening later this year, will initially employ over 100 people.

"Our [employment] model is simple; we start at \$27.50 an hour," said Trieber, adding, "It's a Richmond first policy. We're going to ... reach out to the community through

Richmond Works, the [career services] program of the city of Richmond.”

Richmond has an overall arrest rate of 11 to 1 black folks to white. With the city’s new Cannabis Equity Ordinance just now coming on line (the city of Oakland’s cannabis equity program earned it over \$6.5 million in grants from the State in 2020)—more on that in another column—and relatively very few retail licenses, Richmond has been leaving money on the table.

Once again, it falls to private enterprise to try to fill in the gap. Usually privatization (I shout from my soap box) leads to poorer services and higher costs for lower income folks. Yet, *the people are in need*, and Trieber and his partners see a chance to throw their hat in the ring. “[W]e’re going to try to reach folks that may be in trouble because of cannabis. [B]lack and brown people of course are affected much differently than white folks.”

Affected is one way to say it. Even a non-violent felony record can prevent a person from getting employment or even renting an apartment.

In addition to giving jobs that start at \$7 above the median hourly wage for California, PowerPlant Park employees will get support to apply in court to reduce their felony convictions to a misdemeanor. It is another way to pay back

those who put themselves on the line to bring the plant to consumers for years. Illegally, yes. Immorally, I don't think so. Many wanted, some needed cannabis during prohibition. People in Richmond, with few "legitimate" avenues for financial mobility, provided for that want. Many got stung for the effort. This is a way to pay them back with a straightforward, skill based opportunity.

Part of that payback will be in literal cash. Honestly, this is almost too good to believe. I had to ask Trieber twice to explain this. Indeed, I intend to follow up to make sure it happens. The company will put employees through a professional certification process that triggers a grant from the state of California via the city of Richmond of \$3600 for each employee of color certified. A boon for the company, but check this: Trieber asserts that checks will go straight to employees. Imagine that, getting hired and getting a \$3600 check. We're talking about rent, a car, six months of daycare. I really hope this shit is real. We need solutions like this. We need people with the kind of clout that pulls together seven figure investments in underserved communities to give real support to real people.

Learn more about PowerPlant Park at powerplantpark.com.