

# Plant Based Wellness

BY LAURIE LAMOUNTAIN



I met with Michelle Wheeler and Drew Robbins to talk about the business they opened in the bright yellow building on the bend of Main Hill in Bridgton on a raw, rainy day in May. The cold that I'd come down with a few days earlier was at its peak, so coming to a place that promoted plant-based wellness only accentuated the fact that I was not well. Perhaps if I'd added smoothies to my daily intake, I could have stayed healthy?

Michelle tells me that she and Drew make smoothies every day and it's what brought them to the realization that Bridgton was missing a healthy lunch or snack alternative that they could fill. They envisioned a combination smoothie bar and retail shop called Nectar where they could demonstrate how an under-utilized plant can produce hemp milks, hemp seeds and hemp proteins, all of which provide a really great vegan base for smoothie making. The retail shop would feature hemp clothing, hemp body care products, CBD-infused oils and edibles, etc.

CBD (Cannabidiol) is one of eighty-five different cannabinoids, or chemical components, present in the cannabis plant. THC (Tetrahydrocannabinol) is another. Because CBD has none of the psychoactive effects associated with THC, it's been especially effective in treating children who experience seizures and has shown promising results in studies with autistic children. It's also been found to be effective in treating post-traumatic stress, depression and anxiety, as well as regulating blood sugar.

Israel is the world leader in cannabis research and Raphael Mechoulam, Ph.D.

Last year, the Hemp Industries Association (HIA) estimated the total retail value of all hemp products sold in the U.S. at \$620 million. Sadly, all of the raw hemp materials were imported from other countries. Hemp is an attractive rotation crop for farmers. As it grows, hemp breathes in CO<sub>2</sub>, detoxifies the soil, and prevents soil erosion.

What's left after harvest breaks down into the soil, providing valuable nutrients. Hemp requires much less water to grow — and no pesticides — so it is much more environmentally friendly than traditional crops.

FROM LEAFLY, CANNABIS 101, KENTUCKY HEMPSTERS

was the first one to isolate cannabinoids when he identified THC in 1964. He and his colleagues have been exploring the therapeutic effects of cannabinoids ever since. Humans have an endocannabinoid system that helps regulate, among other things, sleep, digestion, motor control and immune function. Clinical Endocannabinoid Deficiency disrupts these functions, thereby making the body more susceptible to conditions related to their dysfunction, such as rheumatoid arthritis, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, diabetes, irritable bowel syndrome, fibromyalgia and a host of other maladies. Non-psychoactive CBD puts a stop to this by recharging the amount of endocannabinoids in the body and bringing it back into balance.

While the most significant health benefits from cannabis are derived from use of the whole plant, due to regulations and restrictions in the U.S., very little scientific research has been done here. Ironically, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services holds Patent No 6,630,507 on cannabinoids as antioxidants and neuroprotectants. CBD is currently available as an isolated component that can be consumed in many of the same ways as the whole plant, and the retail shop at Nectar will feature many of the devices dedicated to doing that.

The retail shop was Drew and Michelle's original focus, but when they opened the doors of Nectar last summer, the smoothie bar was such an instant success that they were obliged to put the retail shop on hold. Michelle attributes their success to word of mouth recommendations and social media.





“We were so much busier out of the gate than we ever imagined. Everyone that came in here loved it so much that they told five of their friends ‘you have to come here’ and they found us. Even without a website and without a sign” says Michelle.

Now that they have their first summer under their belts, they know what to expect and are ready to roll out both ends of the business. Thanks to partner Paul Sunquist’s investment in Nectar, Drew is able to focus on retail operations and Michelle on the smoothie shop.

Michelle’s lifestyle has included smoothies for a long time and she saw an opportunity with Nectar to take people outside their comfort zones with respect to flavors and ingredients. She wanted them all to have some protein or super food element and she wanted them to all to be very different. She ended up with twelve smoothies and named them after medical cannabis strains. The Maui Wowie is a delectable blend of organic coconut cream, banana, raw macadamia nuts, agave nectar and a few other ingredients. Michelle concocted it for the Four on the Fourth Race because it incorporates four elements for recuperation (sodium, calcium, potassium and magnesium) and it has since become a best seller. Drew describes it as the closest thing to a milkshake without being a milkshake.

Lunch is the busiest time at Nectar. People are looking for something to get them through their day that isn’t a burger with fries or a sandwich. Every smoothie incorporates different super foods that



provide protein and natural energy boosters, so they are an excellent meal replacer. Michelle intentionally designs her smoothies to be 100% vegan and low glycemic so they won’t spike blood sugar. And because they’re made with the whole food, as op-

posed to juices, the energy they provide is lasting. Programmable Vitamixers provide a near-zero waste factor and locally-sourced organic fruits, herbs and vegetables provide freshness. Weekly specials are focused around what’s in season and readily available at the farmers’ market.

Customers have the option of including CBD oil in their smoothies and many of them report that their sleep patterns are better, their back pain has decreased or their stress levels have lowered. Michelle is also happy to tweak ingredients to accommodate allergies and dislikes.

Realizing that kids get intimidated by a smoothie that has spinach and kale in it, Michelle created Nectar Pops as a kid-friendly alternative. They’re also a more affordable option for families. They have the same organic fruits she uses in the smoothies but are smaller and more manageable for little hands.

It’s the little details that make a difference and Michelle is all about them. A zip-lock opening on each Nectar Pop ensures it won’t end up all over the car seats. Organic iced coffee is served with frozen coffee cubes to guarantee that it’s good to the last drop. Starting this summer, the Nectar Food Truck will be available at farmers’ markets with a limited smoothie menu. Drew and Michelle are even thinking about the franchise potential in the Nectar brand.

“As new entrepreneurs and new to this town, it’s been such a great way to meet everybody. Whether it’s people just popping in to say hi or the way the town has shown their support and enthusiasm for our business, it’s been a really positive experience. People really get what we’re doing. They see the health benefits. They’re not treating it as just a smoothie place to come in when it’s hot. Our regulars come in whether it’s cold, rainy or a blizzard,” says Michelle. ☀

#### BANANA KUSH

- 1 1/2 frozen bananas
- 1 c fresh kale
- 2 whole pitted dates
- 1 tablespoon sunflower butter
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 c unsweetened vanilla TEMPT hemp milk

#### STRAWBERRY COUGH

- 1 c frozen strawberries
- 1/4 c frozen raspberries
- 1/4 c frozen Maine blueberries
- 1 chunk raw ginger
- 1 c homemade maple lemonade (water, fresh squeezed lemons, Maine maple syrup)