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Developer: Dave Gulbranson on Thousand Oaks Boulevard.

PHOTO BY DAVID SPRAGUE

REBOUND BLVD.

Thousand Oaks wants a downtown with nightlife

By **CAROL LAWRENCE** Staff Reporter

Thousand Oaks knows its main street will never resemble the Third Street Promenade in Santa Monica or downtown Glendale or Santa Barbara. But a version of those hotspots, the city feels, could help breathe life back into a tired neighborhood.

Downtown-like apartments, more walkable areas and a bit of a nightlife packaged with a new streetscape design is the vision that the city and its business supporters have for a three-mile stretch

of Thousand Oaks Boulevard near the Civic Arts Plaza. And elected officials just approved lighter and looser regulations to help get there.

The City Council last month voted to nearly double the number of new mixed-use apartment-above-retail units to about 400 allowed along the boulevard between Moorpark Road and Duesenberg Drive. It also cut in half the number of parking spaces required for small restaurants, while also loosening up other parking rules for

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Rehab Recovers After Tragedy

HEALTH CARE: Sober College expands after co-founder dies.

By **STEPHANIE HENKEL** Staff Reporter

Robert Pfeifer, co-founder of addiction treatment center **Sober College** in Woodland Hills, dedicated his life to bettering the lives of others. Just last month, the husband and father of two suddenly passed away, but his dream lives on through the center's unusual mission and the people who knew him.

"Robert's passion and vision was, 'How can I help you help yourself?'" said **Mindi Levins Pfeifer**, Pfeifer's widow and co-founder of Sober College. "Hundreds of people had separate

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Hotels Rising in Antelope Valley

HOSPITALITY: Convention center, extended stays to meet demand.

By **HELEN FLOERSH** Staff Reporter

The latest sign that the Great Recession has ended in the Antelope Valley comes in a rush to build new hotels.

A wave of hospitality development that began in 2011 shows no sign of slowing down. Two hotels are slated to open in Palmdale next year, and the recent purchase of two properties for \$1.44 million by Encino-based **Land Developers & Associates** promises at least one more after that. Company President **Daniel Singh** intends to build a joint hotel and conference center at Avenue P-4

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Budding Ad Sales for Pot Publisher

PUBLISHING: Mg hopes to become trade magazine for dispensaries.

By **MARK R. MADLER** Staff Reporter

Darren Roberts knows a lot about the publishing business.

He also knows how to publish magazines on topics outside the mainstream, such as the adult entertainment industry – and now the cannabis industry.

A year ago, Roberts, chief executive of **Cann Media Group LLC** in Woodland Hills, debuted **Mg** magazine, a national monthly publication aimed at the owners of dispensaries, growing operations and other businesses associated with marijuana.

A slick 80-plus page publication, **Mg** looks to not only inform and educate business owners but has higher aspirations of changing how the cannabis industry and those working in it are viewed by them-

selves as well as by the general public.

"We perceive it as professionals, as creative individuals," said the 47-year-old Roberts, referring to his audience. "We don't need to have pot plants all over the magazine for an industry where we all deal in that."

Cann Media and **Mg** are part of a booming industry in the United States.

The fourth edition of the **State of Legal Marijuana Markets** study prepared by **New Frontier**, a cannabis analysis firm in Washington, D.C., and San Francisco's **ArcView Group**, estimated that this year the combined medical and adult-use sales of the drug in the United States at about \$7.1 billion. Sales are expected to grow to \$23 billion by 2020.

California is one of 11 states with voter initiatives on the November ballot to legalize marijuana for either recreational or medicinal use. The state has allowed medicinal use of pot since 1996.

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PHOTO BY DAVID SPRAGUE

Print Man: Darren Roberts with recent issues.



What it takes to get ahead.

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Health Care: Center Offers Classes, Treatment

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relationships with Robert and ask, 'Are you going to sell Sober College?'"

The answer is a resounding no. In fact, the for-profit treatment and education facility has a growth-oriented future as it prepares to move into its new Therapeutic Learning Center in Woodland Hills, which will be dedicated to the memory of Robert Pfeifer, who died of an unexpected heart attack on July 9 at the age of 50.

What sets Sober College apart from other drug rehab facilities is its dual focus on addiction treatment and schooling. To be in the program, a young adult must enroll in Sober College for at least 90 days with the average length of stay closer to nine months. During this time, the person in recovery resides at one of the company's housing or apartment locations and works on his or her addiction through therapy, medical treatment and therapeutic activities such as surfing and rock climbing. Simultaneously, enrollees also pursue their educational goals such as earning a high school equivalency certificate or college credits.

"The business model, I think, really was to help young adults and their families get sober and learn how to live without drugs and alcohol but without having to compromise everything you do as an 18-year-old," said Pfeifer.

Scott Spackey, author of the book "Project Addiction: The Complete Guide to Using, Abusing and Recovering from Drugs and Behaviors" believes therapeutic activities combined with an academic curriculum is good for an addict's self-esteem.

"Anytime someone in recovery is involved with something that's healthy, it helps build confidence, gives them a sense of self-worth and accomplishment and chips away at that nagging feeling we aren't good enough," he said.

Partner search

The Pfeifers started Sober College in 2006 after identifying a need for specialized treatment targeting adults between the ages of 18 and 26. With both Robert and Mindi wanting backgrounds in social work, they wanted to look beyond addiction to the whole person and decided to incorporate education into their treatment.

Starting out, Sober College's biggest challenge was finding a school that would partner with the treatment facility for its educational component. The Pfeifers went to **USC** and **UCLA** with no luck and finally found their dream partner in Burbank-based **Woodbury University**.

Now through the university, Sober College offers five accredited classes in such subjects as public speaking, sociology and health and wellness. In addition, if a student does well in these classes, he or she could receive automatic admission into Woodbury to finish earning a degree.

Another challenge faced was the initial lack of financial support from government and insurance companies as the rehab started with a cash-pay-only model. However, more recent legislation that does not discriminate between physical and mental illnesses, including addiction, has changed that.

"The Affordable Care Act and the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act have provided substance abuse benefits to more than 30 million Americans, so it's certainly a game changer for drug treatment overall," wrote **Bill Hazelton**, chief marketing and admissions officer at Sober College, in an email to the Business Journal. "Before the mental health parity act, insurers could impose less favorable substance abuse benefits, if any at all, compared to the standard medical benefits typically offered. But now, drug treatment limitations cannot be any different than what they are for medical limitations."

The law prevents insurers and health plans from providing lower reimbursement rates for



On Campus: Mindi Pfeifer at the entrance to Sober College in Woodland Hills; right, computer lab as an added resource for clients; below, art studio where clients can get in touch with their creative side.

addiction compared to physical illnesses, while the ACA provides insurance to millions of previously uninsured patients.

Both new laws greatly benefited the couple's business. Nevertheless, **Harry Nelson**, one of Sober College's attorneys and friend to Robert Pfeifer, said the treatment center already did the legwork before these laws went into effect and thus has a solid brand with or without insurance.

"Sober College programs learned to thrive in a pre-insurance environment," he said. "The programs had to survive before insurance was stronger, because they had to build a brand to generate referrals from around the country. Insurance made it more accessible, but I think their model was already proven successful long before ACA."

Its business model is geared toward non-California residents as about 75 percent of its clients are from out of state. Part of the reason for this is because it is often easier for people to commit to sobriety when taken out of their environment.

At any given time, Sober College has about 55 to 60 clients in different stages of the program and has helped nearly 1,200 people in recovery come through the rehab center since inception.

New leader

Following her husband's sudden death, it fell to Pfeifer to carry out his mission. In a state of shock, she made the decision to continue to innovate Sober College and the work it does, all in Robert's honor.

"The truth is now I can't imagine it not becoming everything he wanted it to," she said. "I'm going to do everything I can to honor the kids and business and to keep that crazy visionary spirit alive in everything we do."

Sober College has already expanded south into San Diego and hopes to partner with Woodbury University there to offer similar services and educational resources. Back in the Valley, the rehab center plans to incorporate a hybrid model of its program, where students will mainly participate online and check in at the Woodland Hills campus once a month.

Its current learning center, located at 6233



PHOTOS BY DAVID SPRAGUE

Variel Ave., houses an art studio, music studio and performing venue as well as the rehab's clinical staff. However, in the upcoming weeks, Sober College will be moving to a larger Therapeutic Learning Center just down the street.

The new 33,000-square-foot facility will include a professional recording studio, yoga and meditation room, a library, computer lab, fitness evaluation studio as well as a music and performance hall. It will also connect to an administration building, providing the center with a more cohesive space.

Aside from its main campus which holds the learning center, administrative offices as well as some student housing, Sober College has many locations throughout the greater Val-

ley, including other housing facilities and places for therapeutic activity like hiking, snowboarding and even indoor skydiving.

Furthermore, students and staff recently built the world's largest dreamcatcher, a traditional Native American craftwork, and have been in contact with **Guinness World Records Inc.** to document it. They built the dreamcatcher to symbolize how addiction kills dreams and how dreamcatchers can bring them back. But with Pfeifer's death, the dreamcatcher also represents how his dream and spirit live on through the work of Sober College.

"Sober College was all his (Robert's) idea," said Pfeifer. "We hope we can just keep this going for him, and we have to believe he is still here."

Visit <http://sobercollege.com> to learn more about Sober College and all it has to offer young adults in recovery from addiction.