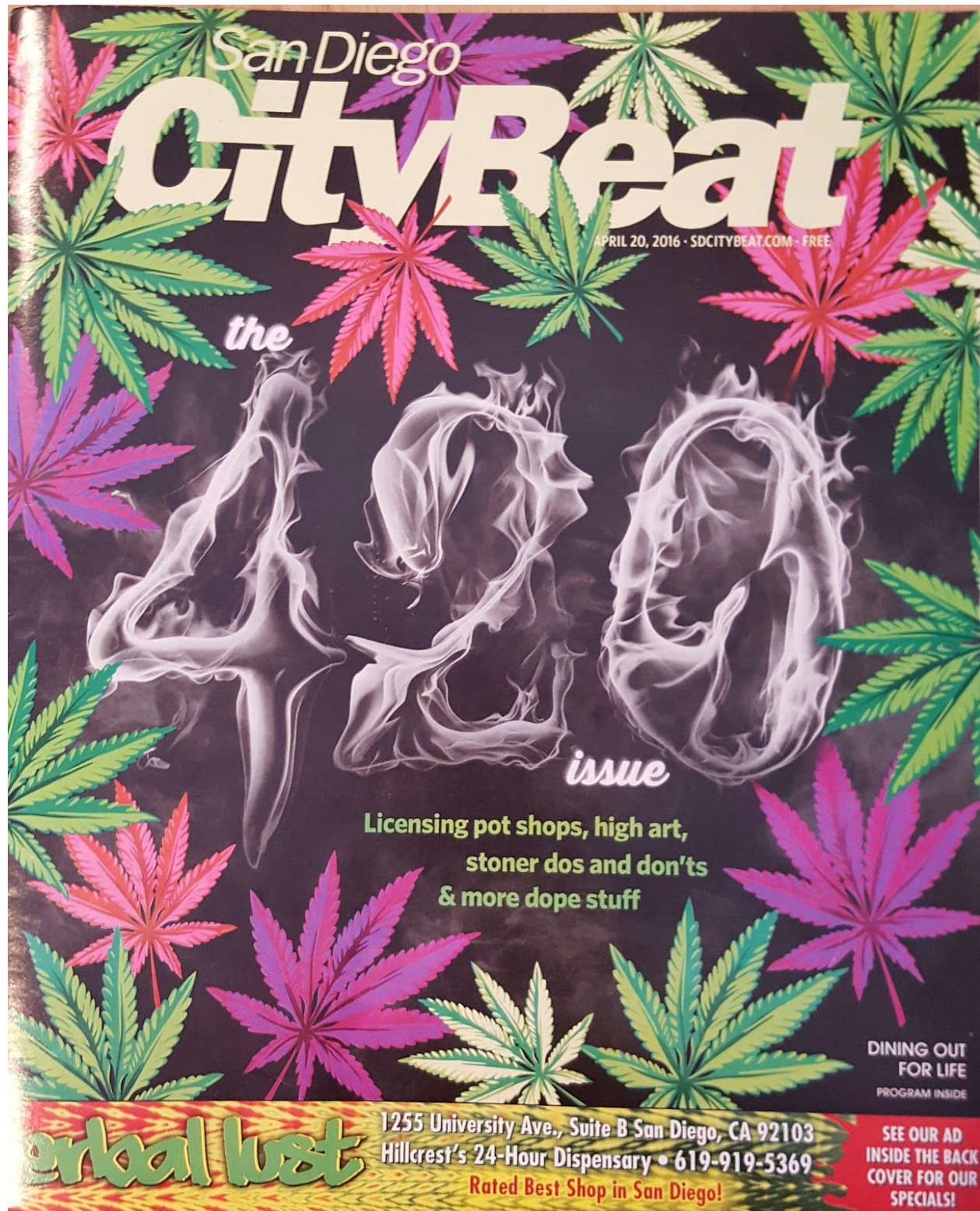




San Diego

CityBeat

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the



issue

Licensing pot shops, high art,
stoner dos and don'ts
& more dope stuff

DINING OUT
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DISHING IT OUT

San Diego restaurants going to pot?

For many people, a hit of pot is the perfect aperitif to a meal—and the perfect closer. Some people like to do it in between as well. That's their choice. Whatever you want to say about the wacky weed, its appetite-inducing powers are legendary. Ever hear of a thing called "the Munchies"?

If all goes to plan, Californians will vote on legalizing recreational marijuana in November, joining a list of lit-up states that includes Colorado, Washington, Oregon and Alaska.

Polls suggest six out of 10 likely voters support marijuana legalization. Some legalization supporters say a 15 percent tax on weed could bring as much as \$1 billion to state coffers.

Local restaurateurs like Yohe Umezu also believe it could increase business. Their business.

Umezu owns **San Diego Poke Company** (10387 Friars Road), which will open for business May 1. He believes pot legalization will only increase sales.

"There's an obvious reason, marijuana causes munchies," he says. "An increase in appetite is a common side effect of smoking pot and because of this I can really see it benefiting the community."

Although potheads are stereotyped as people that just subsist on Doritos, Umezu says that's a myth.

"No one wants to eat the same thing every single day, not even stoners," he said. "They would be much more inclined to go around and test different types of food and hopefully stay away from the generic fast food places that we go to when we have nothing else to eat."

Umezu's theory is spot on, according to Colorado restaurant owner Kyle Sabra, who runs Fat Jack's Subs, a Denver chain with six locations.

"Since marijuana has been legalized here, we've seen increased sales," he says. "When people are under the influence of pot, they're hungrier. We're selling more dessert and cookies and we've started selling pints of ice cream."

Sabra also says he's benefitting from a population boom caused by people who are moving to Colorado specifically for the legal bud.

"We advertise at dispensaries," he says. "And delivery business has increased."

BY JAMES VERNETTE

Increased food sales are one thing, but Karen Barnett, owner of **Small Bar** (4268 Park Blvd.) in University Heights, believes legal pot might decrease alcohol consumption, but that's not a bad thing.

"I think more people would come to eat than drink," she says. "I can tell you I'd be the first one to host a dinner utilizing marijuana as an ingredient in cuisine. It's an idea/conversation I've had with other chefs in San Diego and it has legs."

Barnett thinks there could be other benefits for restaurants if pot is legalized: Fewer belligerent drunks.

"After seven years in the bar industry and 20 years in the food industry, I can't recall one issue with stoned customers. They're typically mellow, happy, and quiet," she says.

But restaurateur Ryan Jubela believes there could be some growing pains if pot is legalized.

Jubela, who owns **Masters Kitchen and Cocktail** (208 S. Coast Hwy.) in Oceanside worries that some employees might think legal pot gives them license to light up before work.

"With alcohol it's pretty easy to tell if someone has been drinking, unlike marijuana," he says. "I think we would have large problem with employees thinking since it's now legal, that smoking while on break is acceptable. This will for sure cause a customer service issue and possible work comp claims."

Sabra says Jubela has a point.

"When pot was first legalized in Colorado, there was a perception that people who smoke would be doing it all the time," he says. "But the state has done a good job of telling people how to be safe about smoking."

Jubela also doesn't believe every type of restaurant will benefit from increased business from munchies craving pot smokers.

"It really depends on what type of restaurant you are trying to be," he says. "If you're a fast casual restaurant then yes. However if you're Market Del Mar then no. As for me I would not try and market to the pot smoking masses."

Jubela may be in the minority, based on the experience in Colorado where, Sabra says, dispensaries are starting to outnumber Starbucks.

Umezu definitely thinks restaurants and fast food joints will have to market to stoners as a matter of course—and some already are.

"The KFC Corporation was approved on February 3, 2015, for their marijuana retail recreation pot/medical marijuana occupational business license," Umezu says. "Currently, 42 of the nearly 100 KFC franchises in the state of Colorado have added this 'option' to their menu."



Dishing It Out appears every other week.

