

VVC, Adelanto could create cannabis college

Tuesday

Posted Feb 21, 2017 at 11:32 AM Updated Feb 21, 2017 at 11:49 AM

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VICTORVILLE — "In the cannabis apple, hemp is the easy bite." And Victor Valley College might want a taste.

It was during discussion about bringing medical marijuana research to the college at last week's meeting that the VVC Board of Trustees received an unexpected offer from the mayor of Adelanto.

"I will give you the land. We will build a college for you (in Adelanto)," Mayor Rich Kerr said. "We will fund the college for you, through federal and state grants. You have to do nothing except embrace what we can offer."

Calling it "a pretty unbelievable offer," Board President Brandon Wood said it was the first time he's seen anybody extend property and buildings to the college.

"You're seriously offering VVC that the City of Adelanto will build a satellite campus ... and pay all the costs associated with that for essentially (what would become) a technical training center for the hemp medical cannabis industry?" Wood asked.

"That came out of my mouth, yes sir," Kerr responded. "When the students are done being educated through you, they can work in Adelanto ... This is about the community in the High Desert."

Kerr suggested the campus could be built by The Glasper Center near City Hall — "a perfect place" with thousands of commuters going by every day.

An interest in developing a "west-side" campus has been longstanding among VVC trustees, but last November Trustee John Pinkerton said they still weren't ready because of "the giant hole in the ground" — i.e. the 55 acres of land on the Oro Grande Wash the college purchased for \$10.9 million in 2008. Even if it could be leveled and built on, "we couldn't afford to staff it," Pinkerton said.

Kerr's offer could be a game-changer.

Although Trustee Dennis Henderson asked if Kerr had the votes of the Adelanto City Council — and Kerr said he did — the Daily Press could not confirm this through meeting minutes or with Adelanto city officials last week.

Kerr said he was looking to start on the project "right away," and Wood advised him to meet with VVC President/Superintendent Dr. Roger Wagner.

"I'm sure he'd be interested to sit down and start picking out paint colors," Wood said.

But before Kerr's surprise proposal, the topic of medical marijuana had already grown controversial among the board.

Dr. Trent Jones, an aquaponic grower for natural plant medicine, kicked off the discussion with the "cannabis apple" analogy to emphasize why his research team would like to help VVC develop a model for a vocational horticulture program.

"Natural plant medicine, food production, outdoor cultivation — it's an easy way to start, it's federally legal, and you would definitely lead the curve," Jones said.

Trustee Tortorici spoke out, saying that while she didn't doubt the merit of Jones' work, she didn't think it made sense for VVC to get involved.

"Community colleges don't have the role of research," Tortorici said, noting that this would be a program for four-year institutions.

Being the one who placed the item for discussion, Trustee Joseph W. Brady told the Daily Press he is "absolutely interested in changing that community colleges are not in the research industry."

"There'll be another open discussion with the academic senate to see if they want to be one of the first community colleges in the state with this program," Brady said, noting that he's already heard talk of a similar horticulture programs in at least one other California junior college.

"The City of Adelanto, whether you agree with it or not, has created a tremendous amount of jobs, and we have to ask how VVC can be a part of the solution in creating long-term sustainable jobs with education."

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