

JANUARY 1, 2025

WESTERN TRADER

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ISSUE NO. 1

DINING • ARTS • ENTERTAINMENT • EVENTS



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Falls, SD. Successful bidder shall furnish Workman's Compensation and Certificate of Insurance and will be required to provide an affidavit of compliance with 49 CFR Part 382 of the Omnibus Transportation Employee Testing Act of 1991 (Drug & Alcohol Testing). The Board of County Commissioners, reserves the right to accept or reject any or all bids and waive any defects therein. Corson County Board of Commissioners; PO Box 255; McIntosh, SD 57641.

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Feb. 18-20: Climate and Business Management

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Classified Ad Form • Deadline • 5 p.m. Friday

Classified Ad Category List

Circle One

Announcements	Horses, Livestock
Antiques	Lawn and Garden
Appliances	Lost and Found
Arts and Crafts	Misc. for Sale
Autos for Sale	Mobile Homes
Auto Parts, Repair	Motorcycles
Boats	Personal
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Garage Sales - _____	Wanted
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Date _____

Name _____

Address _____

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Insertion Dates:

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1	2	3	4	5	6	7							
8	9	10	11	12	13	14							
15	\$8.00	16	\$8.10	17	\$8.20	18	\$8.30	19	\$8.40	20	\$8.50	21	\$8.60
22	\$8.70	23	\$8.80	24	\$8.90	25	\$9.00	26	\$9.10	27	\$9.20	28	\$9.30
29	\$9.40	30	\$9.50	31	\$9.60	32	\$9.70	33	\$9.80	34	\$9.90	35	\$10.00
36	\$10.10	37	\$10.20	38	\$10.30	39	\$10.40	40	\$10.50	41	\$10.60	42	\$10.70
43	\$10.80	44	\$10.90	45	\$11.00	46	\$11.10	47	\$11.20	48	\$11.30	49	\$11.40

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Medical dispensaries are closing after rejection of recreational marijuana

By John Hult
South Dakota Searchlight

The trouble signs started about a year in.

B.J. Olson had opened his medical cannabis dispensary, called "Unity Rd.," in the summer of 2022, less than a month after medical pot sales became legal in South Dakota.

That first month or two, things were fine. Olson's revenue lined up nicely with his projections.

Then came the competition. Dispensaries were popping up all over the Sioux Falls metro area, which Olson serviced from his location in Hartford.

"Every time a new dispensary opened, it would be a little less and a little less," Olson told South Dakota Searchlight in a recent interview. "Then it was a race to the bottom on pricing."

Unity Rd. is one of at least eight dispensary businesses that had a license from the state Department of Health last winter but no longer does. An archived version of the state's medical pot website from February listed 78 dispensaries on its licensing page. The December figure, listed on the current version of that same page, lists 70.

Meanwhile, the number of patient cardholders in the state has also been declining, from nearly 14,000 last winter to fewer than 12,000 currently.

The negative cardholder trend and a too-fast expansion of dispensaries were part of the problem for Olson's Hartford shop. He said regulations were another part.

The state's medical cannabis rules prohibit advertising. Social media posts deemed too close to advertising drew warnings from the state, Olson said. The price of an annual dispensary license from the state went up. He had to pay specialty accountants to do his taxes and five times the price of the tax preparation bill he was used to paying in his other business ventures.

Cannabis businesses cannot deduct most business expenses like rent or employee wages, but can deduct cost-of-business expenses. Threading that needle takes a tax preparer versed in the frequently shifting regulations on



GOING OUT OF BUSINESS — Unity Rd., a medical cannabis dispensary in Hartford, closed in November. (John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight). [Submitted Photo/JOHN HULT - SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT]

cannabis business rules.

"It was all the little things that added up," Olson said.

Beyond messages about errant social media posts, there was the warning about a steel door between Olson's medical cannabis shop and the separate smoke shop business he owned on the other side of his building.

Olson called the door "impassable," but the state didn't like that it had hinges. He responded by pulling the door out and installing what he described as an eighth-inch piece of plywood in the empty space to prove he'd physically closed off his medical pot business from his other shop, thereby complying with state rules.

"Even though I could literally put my fist through it, that was OK," Olson said.

Had Initiated Measure 29 passed on Election Day and legalized the possession of recreational marijuana, Olson said, he'd still be in business. But it didn't.

"I was ready to go for the ride," said Olson, who expected it would've taken another two years for lawmakers to set up a legal retail market.

Instead, Olson announced in November he'd be closing both his medical cannabis dispensary and his smoke shop. The market is oversaturated, he said, and it's not worth the hassle.

"I'd already put four years into it," Olson said. "I wanted to be done with it."

Handful of closures, more expected

Joe Stavig, chief financial officer of Dakota Herb's dispensary and cultivation business, has heard about other dispensary closures since the failure of IM 29 at the ballot box in November.

Stavig is hopeful in one way about the future of the medical marijuana industry in the state. At least some of the people who'd held off on seeking medical pot cards in hopes voters would legalize recreational marijuana might apply for cards now.

Even so, Stavig said, the dropping patient numbers have already done financial damage to the industry.

"What we're seeing is some of these smaller dispensaries closing down, and even potentially some

smaller cultivators shutting down, because of what we've seen over the last six months with the patient card count," Stavig said.

Cardholders peaked in February of 2024 at 13,705. This month, that number is 11,635 – a 15 percent drop.

Alan Welsh, a Dakota Herb co-founder and former Highway Patrol leader, puts at least some of the blame on the increasing availability of pot alternatives like hemp-derived gummies and smokable flower.

Welsh and Stavig like their chances because their company is vertically integrated with cultivation, wholesaling and dispensaries. But Welsh can't see standalone dispensaries competing against smoke shops selling weed-like products with similar effects. Those shops capitalized on a legal loophole in the 2018 federal farm bill to sell products derived from hemp by synthesizing intoxicants found in small amounts in hemp and adding enough to create high-inducing products.

The Legislature passed a bill last winter to bar the sale of weed alternatives, but the law is being challenged in court, and Welsh, Stavig and Olson said the law has done little so far to stem the flow of those products.

"There might be some kind of enforcement coming, but it's never been enforced," Welsh said.

Olson, for his part, said that by offering those products at his smoke shop, he was competing with his medical marijuana dispensary.

"All of these smoke shops that are open all throughout the state of South Dakota, myself included, that's selling legal weed," Olson said. "It's 100 percent selling legal weed. There's no regulation. I can buy product from anywhere in the country, have it shipped to me and sell it."

Other things could also be done to boost card numbers, said Stavig, of Dakota Herb. He intends to advocate for expanding the list of qualifying conditions for a patient card, and for the addition of an industry representative to the state's Medical Marijuana Oversight Council.

Regulation issues shutter one shop

The state Department of Health has yet to respond to a South Dakota Searchlight email regarding cease and desist letters, warnings and enforcement actions against state dispensaries.

But Roy Nielsen, owner of a cultivation facility and dispensaries in Sioux Falls and Yankton, is familiar with at least four of them. The Roy'zzz license for its Sioux Falls-based dispensary is on hold until a January hearing, Nielsen said, over its alleged violations of cannabis program rules.

One of the violations, he said, came when a dispensary employee posted an image of cannabis use to their Snapchat story, which disappeared in 24 hours and was only visible to that employees' Snapchat friends.

Even though the employee wasn't acting as an employee, Nielsen said, the company caught a cease

and desist letter over the post.

One administrative program rule prohibits social media posts that depict the use of cannabis.

Another came because someone at the Sioux Falls shop had jokingly put a Scooby-Doo mask on a mannequin in the entry area between the shop's front doors and its cardholder-access-only dispensary area.

Another program rule prohibits "using cartoons, toys, or other products or images commonly associated with or marketed to individuals under 21 years of age."

"The state came in and took a picture," said Nielsen, who spent decades selling medication for pets in Iowa before switching to the cannabis business. "It was like a cartoon character."

Nielsen said shutting down the shop until January put him and his employees in a tough spot for the holidays.

"I care about my people," Nielsen said. "I've got to figure out how to pay them."

Like Stavig and Olson, Nielsen said he's hoping to survive what he expects will be a wave of dispensary consolidations in South Dakota. He's hired a medical director to help educate patients and anyone else who'll listen about the benefits of well-regulated medical cannabis.

But he's also not holding his breath for a more welcoming environment. At this point, he's thinking about Minnesota, a neigh-

boring state in the process of setting up a recreational market.

In his previous life as a pet med purveyor, Nielsen said, he grew accustomed to working with regulators on matters of safety, efficacy and drug testing.

"We dealt with the Department of Ag, the EPA, the FDA," Nielsen said. "Nothing's been harder for me to navigate than the Department of Health."

Olson, the former Hartford dispensary owner who claims to have gone from "one of the first dispensaries open to one of the first ones to close," offered a similar sentiment. It wasn't just the tax issues or the competition or the state's concerns about how he kept his smoke shop and pot shop separate.

South Dakota touts itself as business friendly, but Olson said he never felt that love as a dispensary owner.

"They were always in our back pocket, always making us fearful of this, that or the other," Olson said. "No other industry has to live in fear like that."

South Dakota Searchlight is part of States Newsroom, the nation's largest state-focused non-profit news organization. South Dakota Searchlight provides free news and commentary on critical issues facing the state. We seek to serve the public interest with accuracy, fairness, insight and civility. See more at southdakotasearchlight.com.

BLACK HILLS EATS

CUSTER EATS

BUGLIN' BULL

RESTAURANT & SPORTS BAR

Sunday–Thursday
11 a.m.–8 p.m.
Friday–Saturday 11 a.m.–9 p.m.

BLACK HILLS BURGER & PIZZA CO.

Tuesday–Saturday
11 a.m.–2:30 p.m.
Wednesday–Friday 5–7:30 p.m.

SKOGEN KITCHEN

Tuesday–Saturday
5–8 p.m.

CALAMITY JANE'S

Tuesday–Sunday
7 a.m.–2 p.m.

SUBWAY RESTAURANT

Monday–Saturday
8 a.m.–9 p.m.
Sunday 8 am.–8 p.m.

CUSTER BEACON

Wednesday–Saturday
4 p.m.–Close

HILL CITY EATS

THREE FORKS BAR, GRILLE & CASINO

Daily 11 a.m.–7 p.m.

HOT SPRINGS EATS

EDGEMONT EATS

IGLOO BAR

Daily
9 a.m.–12 a.m.
Friday & Saturday
9 a.m.–2 a.m.

ISABELLA'S

Sunday–Wednesday
11 a.m.–8 p.m.
Thursday–Saturday
11 a.m.–9 p.m.

PERKINS TAVERN

Monday–Wednesday
11 a.m.–8 p.m.
Thursday–Sunday
7 am–9 pm

CUSTER COUNTY CANDY CO.

Sun–Fri 11–5
Sat 11–6

ALL ABOARD

Monday–Saturday
11 a.m.–8 p.m.
Sunday
11 a.m.–7 p.m.

TURTLE TOWN

Sunday–Thursday
10 a.m.–4 p.m.
Friday–Saturday
9 a.m.–5 p.m.

AMERICAN LEGION

Monday–Saturday
10 a.m.–Close

KHANTONG THAI CUISINE

Monday–Wednesday–Friday
11 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

PIZZA BARN

Monday–Thursday
4–9 pm
Friday & Saturday
4–10 pm

CUSTER DELI

Monday–Thursday 8 a.m.–4 pm
Friday 8 a.m.–5 p.m.
Saturday 9 a.m.–3 p.m.
Sunday Closed

HILL CITY CAFE

Monday–Saturday
7 a.m.–1 p.m.
Sunday Closed

HERMOSA EATS

DAIRY QUEEN

Daily
10:30 a.m.–9 p.m.

THE HAT CREEK GRILL

Friday & Saturday
Noon–10 p.m.

UNCLE VITO'S

Tuesday–Friday
7 a.m.–2 p.m.
Saturday
7 a.m.–10 a.m.

CUSTER WOLF

Monday–Saturday
11:30 a.m.–8 p.m.

CHUTE ROOSTER

Thursday–Monday
11 a.m.–9 p.m.
Sunday 10 a.m.–6 p.m.

TURTLE TOWN

Sunday–Thursday
10 a.m.–4 p.m.
Friday–Saturday
9 a.m.–5 p.m.

HERMOSA EATS

CORNER PANTRY DELI

Daily 6 a.m.–8 p.m.

DAIRY QUEEN

Daily
10:30 a.m.–9 p.m.

MORNIN' SUNSHINE

Monday–Saturday
7 a.m.–2 p.m.
Sunday 7 a.m.–1 p.m.

VICTORY STEAKHOUSE & LOUNGE

Tues–Sat 11 a.m.–9 p.m.

PRINGLE EATS

THE HITCHRAIL BAR & RESTAURANT

Tuesday–Sunday
11 a.m.–8 p.m.

DAIRY QUEEN

Monday–Saturday
11 a.m.–8 p.m.
Sunday 11 a.m.–7 p.m.

CREAM

Tuesday–Saturday
10 a.m.–3:30 p.m.

HERMOSA EATS

PIZZA HUT

Monday–Saturday
11 a.m.–9 p.m.

YESWAY

Monday–Saturday
6 a.m.–9 p.m.
Sunday 8 a.m.–9 p.m.

RAPID CITY EATS

SHIPWRECK'S BAR & GRILL

Monday–Wednesday
11 a.m.–8 p.m.

DAKOTA BROASTED

Tuesday–Saturday
11 a.m.–6 p.m.

SICK-N-TWISTED

Thursday–Monday
11 a.m.–8 p.m.

HERMOSA EATS

LINTZ BROS. PIZZA

Thursday–Monday
3–9 p.m.

HERMOSA SENIOR CITIZENS CENTER

Monday–Thursday
Noon–close

PIZZA HUT

Monday–Saturday
11 a.m.–9 p.m.

SILK ROAD EXPERIENCE

Thursday–Saturday
3–7 p.m.

YESWAY #1174

Daily
Open 24 hours

NEWCASTLE EATS

FRONTIER BAR & GRILL

Daily 11 a.m.–9 p.m.
Closed Tuesday

GOLD RUN CAFÉ

Sunday–Thursday
8 a.m.–2 p.m.
Friday–Saturday
10 a.m.–3:30 p.m.

HERMOSA EATS

79 LOUNGE

Daily 11 a.m.–6 p.m.

SOUTHERN HILLS DINER & BAKERY

Thursday–Monday 8 a.m.–2 p.m.
Tuesday & Wednesday Closed

BOOPA'S

Tuesday–Friday
7 a.m.–2 pm
Saturday
7 a.m.–10 a.m.

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GOLD PAN SALOON

11–2 a.m.
Food 11–2 a.m.

HEART OF THE HILLS EXXON

Daily 5 a.m.–Midnight

LAZY R BAR & GRILL

Tuesday–Saturday
4–9 p.m.

SOUTHERN HILLS GOLF COURSE

Daily 7 a.m.–8 p.m.

DONNA'S MAIN ST. DINER

Daily
6 a.m.–2 p.m.

KAFFEE KLATSCH

Mon–Wed 5:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.
Tues, Thurs, Fri.
5:30 a.m.–1 p.m.
Saturday 6:30 a.m.–10:30 a.m.

HJEM AM

Friday 8 a.m.–11 a.m.
Saturday & Sunday
8 a.m.–Noon

SILVER DOLLAR SALOON

Monday–Thursday
1–10 p.m.
Friday–Sunday Noon–10 p.m.

KEYSTONE EATS

SPRINGS COFFEE KIOSK

Mon–Fri 5:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.
Saturday 5:30 a.m.–2 p.m.
Sunday 5:30 a.m.–Noon

CAMBRIA COFFEE & DECKER'S MARKET

Monday–Friday 7 a.m.–5 p.m.
Saturday 7 a.m.–2 p.m.
Sunday 8 a.m.–Noon

LAUGHING WATER RESTAURANT

Monday–Friday 11 a.m.–4 p.m.
Saturday–Sunday breakfast
9 a.m.–1 p.m. Lunch 11 a.m.–4 p.m.

TAQUERIA LOS CAMELINAS

Monday–Friday 4–7 p.m.
Saturday 11 a.m.–2 p.m.

ENO'S PIZZA & PUB

Monday–Thursday
11 a.m.–9 p.m.
Friday–Sunday 11 a.m.–10 p.m.

TACO JOHN'S

Monday–Saturday
7 a.m.–9 pm.
Sunday 8 a.m.–8 p.m.

HOT STUFF PIZZA

Daily
5 a.m.–6 p.m.

MARIA'S MEXICAN RESTAURANT

Monday–Saturday
6:30–10 a.m., 11 a.m.–3 p.m.
4:30–8:30 p.m.

TIN CITY SALOON

Friday–Wednesday
11 a.m.–8 p.m.

KEYSTONE EATS

KEYSTONE COUNTRY STORE

Daily 7 am–9 pm

THE BERM (FOOD TRUCK)

Wednesday–Saturday
11:30 a.m.–6 p.m.

TACO JOHN'S

Daily
11 a.m.–10 p.m.

MINER'S CUP

Monday–Saturday
6:30 a.m.–1:30 p.m.

TAQUERIA LOS CAMELINAS

Monday–Friday 4–7 p.m.
Saturday 11 a.m.–2 p.m.

TURTLE TOWN

Monday–Saturday
10 a.m.–6 p.m.
Sunday 10 a.m.–5 p.m.

TWO COWS CREAMERY & BISTRO

Monday–Thursday 11 a.m.–8 p.m.
Friday & Saturday 11 a.m.–9 p.m.
Sunday 11 a.m.–7 p.m.

HANNAH'S HEAVENLY TREATS

Tues–Fri 7 a.m.–2 p.m.
Saturday 7 a.m.–10 a.m.

PIZZA MILL

Tuesday–Saturday
11 a.m.–7 p.m.
Delivery Fri & Sat 4–6 p.m.

TAQUERIA LOS CAMELINAS

Monday–Friday 4–7 p.m.
Saturday 11 a.m.–2 p.m.

XANTERRA@MT. RUSHMORE

Daily 8 a.m.–9 p.m.

HEAVEN SCENT BAKERY

Wednesday–Monday
10 a.m.–5 p.m.

HOWDY BAKERY

Thursday, Friday, Saturday
8 a.m.–6 p.m.
Saturday 9 a.m.–4 p.m.

CARVER'S CAFE @ MT. RUSHMORE

8 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

WANDERING BISON COFFEE

Mon, Tues, Thurs 7 a.m.–3 p.m.
Friday & Saturday 3–6 p.m.
Sunday 8 a.m.–3 p.m.

HI-16 CAFE

Thursday–Sunday
7 a.m.–9 p.m.

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Sun–Thurs 10 a.m.–8:45 p.m.
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WHISKEY RIVER

Wed–Sat 8 a.m.–8:30 p.m.
Sunday 9 a.m.–3 p.m.
Closed Monday–Tuesday

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