



Medical marijuana facility breaks ground in South Heidelberg Township

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Prime Wellness of Pennsylvania broke ground Friday on its proposed medical marijuana facility in South Heidelberg Township, marking another step in the process of bringing the drug to the state.

Representatives from the company, financial backers and township officials gathered at the future site of the \$5 million facility at 2 Corporate Blvd. in the township's Industrial Center.

Over the last three months, Prime representatives have been in the township, securing all the necessary approvals to move ahead with its 30,000-square-foot facility for the growing and processing of marijuana to help patients with 17 different medical conditions.

Now, their focus moves to clearing out the site, beginning construction and starting to grow and process medical marijuana before the state Health Department's Dec. 20 deadline.

"It's the next frontier in terms of the medicine and all it does," said Sharon Ali, CEO of Prime Wellness of Pennsylvania. "This is exciting. We're pioneers in this process."

In June, the company was awarded one of the two exclusive permits for the southeast region in the first round of the state's medical marijuana program.

Franklin Labs LLC won the other permit to grow and process medical marijuana in the region and will also operate in Berks County. The company will set up shop at 1800 Centre Ave., after purchasing the former Pepsi distribution center for \$1.6 million.

Prime's grow facility is phase one of the project. A second phase will include a 25,000-square-foot greenhouse, and the company expects to hire about 50 employees by the third year of operation.

Prime has hosted several meetings with township officials since it was approved to grow medical marijuana on June 20, said Tom Byrne, supervisors chairman. It has also offered a \$50,000 donation to the township's general fund to show its commitment to the community, township officials said.

That annual donation could grow based on the company's earnings, they said.

Byrne said the company has taken the time to educate the community about medical marijuana and what it plans to do in South Heidelberg.

"It's a great use of this area," Byrne said. "We're thrilled to have them

here. We're focused on transparency for our businesses. This is the textbook case of what we're looking for."

The company plans to grow medical marijuana in temporary pods as it builds its larger facility, said Jim Doherty, III, legal counsel for the company. That approach, which will require approval from the Health Department, would allow the company to have product ready to be sold to dispensaries by the end of December.

"We intend to be the first to the market," Doherty said. "If there are dispensaries that can serve us, we intend to provide them with any product that they need. That's one of the strengths of Prime. We will be able to meet their needs for product as soon as they are able to place orders."

Prime features extensive experience working with medical marijuana. One of its principal backers, High Street Capital Partners, has invested in marijuana projects in 14 states.

Another principal backer, H. Chase Lenfest, is a managing member with HCL MM Investments PA. Lenfest's family has a long history of philanthropic work, providing more than \$1.3 billion to more than 1,100 organizations.

Lenfest said he sees medical marijuana as a business opportunity that could help a lot of people, particularly children with seizure disorders and autism.

"I cannot wait to actually meet with people who the product helped and bringing that to fruition," Lenfest said. "That's what's going to be really exciting."

Ali applauded everyone who made the ceremony possible less than three months after Prime won the license from the state.

"We welcome the opportunity to really take a strong, strong leadership role in the medical marijuana industry, and we're committed to making that happen," she said.

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