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# A smoking new read

## Pot advocates produce book

Peter Marcus, DDN Staff Writer

Friday, August 21, 2009

A hero to potheads across the nation, local marijuana advocate Mason Tvert continues his smokin' streak with Amazon.com best-selling book "Marijuana is Safer."

His first book aims to convince supporters and opponents alike that marijuana is a safer recreational alternative to other substances like alcohol.

"Marijuana is Safer: So Why Are We Driving People to Drink?" is co-written by fellow pot experts Paul Armentano, deputy director of The National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, and Steve Fox, director of state campaigns for the Marijuana Policy Project.

A launch event for the book will be held Sunday at 2 p.m. at 8 Rivers Cafe, 1550 Blake St.

Tvert became famous in Denver for leading voters to legalize the simple possession of marijuana in 2005. When police and city officials ignored the will of voters by continuing to arrest people for the possession of one ounce or less of marijuana, Tvert and his organization, Safer Alternative for Enjoyable Recreation, fought back. A subsequent voter-approved initiative in 2007 made the cops promise to make marijuana their "lowest law enforcement priority."

The 2007 initiative created the Marijuana Policy Review Panel, which includes both city leaders and citizens with the aim of holding police to the voters' demand of not arresting people for the simple possession of weed. The panel worked. Earlier this year Tvert announced that marijuana prosecutions dropped 21 percent.

He hopes to continue that trend with "Marijuana is Safer."

"There's been a great deal of debate surrounding marijuana and marijuana laws, but too many Americans are still unaware of the fact that marijuana is far safer than alcohol," Tvert told the *Denver Daily News* yesterday. "The book's message that marijuana prohibition, paired with current alcohol laws, is driving people to drink is something many people haven't considered — we're trying to highlight the fact that we're not trying to promote a drug, we're trying to provide an alternative, a safer alternative to alcohol."

The book uses research and scientific evidence to compare and contrast the relative harms and legal status of both marijuana and alcohol. In the end, there has never been a documented case of someone dying from marijuana use, but every year 100,000 Americans die from alcohol-related causes.

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**Big seller**

Readers must be interested in the topic — as of press time last night, “Marijuana is Safer” was listed as No. 17 on Amazon.com’s top 100 bestsellers, making “Marijuana is Safer” the all-time top-selling marijuana-related book on Amazon.com.

The book has been endorsed by medical and psychology professors, law enforcement officials, former New Mexico Republican Gov. Gary Johnson, an executive with the conservative-leaning Cato Institute, a former executive with the American Civil Liberties Union, and even by professional athletes.

“It’s going great, more and more people are coming to realize marijuana is safer than alcohol, and as a result, more and more people are open to discussing reform and allowing adults to make the safer choice,” said Tvert. “Support for marijuana reform has grown every year here in Denver and it certainly seems to be growing on the national level.”

The outspoken pot advocate believes reform will happen on a state-by-state basis. SAFER ran a statewide voter initiative in 2006 attempting to legalize the simple possession of marijuana, but voters rejected the question. Tvert believes, however, that support is growing.

A similar initiative is currently being carried in Breckenridge — a marijuana advocacy group in the mountain town has successfully qualified the initiative for the November ballot.

And as states consider their fiscal woes — exacerbated by the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression — some, like California, are considering legalizing and taxing pot to help with budget shortfalls.

On the federal level, Congressman Barney Frank, D-Mass., is working on legislation that would remove federal penalties for personal marijuana use.

Part of the mission of “Marijuana is Safer” is to get the book into the hands of lawmakers to encourage them to craft marijuana reform policies. Tvert is asking supporters to not only buy a copy of the book for themselves, but also for their state representative.

“This isn’t about being pro-drug,” he said. “This is about being pro-safety, pro-health and pro-good public policy, and allowing adults to make the rational, safer choice to use marijuana instead of alcohol if that’s what they prefer so that we’re no longer driving people to drink.”

**“Marijuana is Safer: So Why Are We Driving People to Drink?”  
Book Launch Event**

**WHEN:** Sunday, 2-5 p.m.

**WHERE:** 8 Rivers Cafe, 1550 Blake St.

**COST:** \$20 buys you a copy of the book; \$30 gets you a copy and one sent to a lawmaker

**BOOK INFO:** Paperback; Chelsea Green Publishing; Authors: Mason Tvert, Paul Armentano and Steve Fox

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