

Green Tuesday: Crowds line up at 1st East Coast pot shops

November 20 2018, by Steven Senne And Bob Salsberg



Stephen Mandile, right, an Iraq War veteran from Uxbridge, Mass., is the first to purchase recreational marijuana at the Cultivate dispensary on the first day of legal sales, Tuesday, Nov. 20, 2018, in Leicester, Mass. Cultivate is one of the first two shops permitted to sell recreational marijuana in the eastern United States, more than two years after Massachusetts voters approved it in 2016. (AP Photo/Steven Senne)

People lined up in the rain Tuesday morning to be among the first customers at the first two legal pot shops on the U.S. East Coast, more

than two years after Massachusetts voters approved of recreational marijuana for adults.

The state's first commercial pot shops opened in Leicester and Northampton—selling strains of the part of the plant that can be smoked, pre-rolled joints and edibles such as brownies and chocolate bars.

Marijuana is already sold legally in six Western states but the long-awaited opening of recreational outlets in Massachusetts marks a major milestone for the industry in the U.S. Canada began legal sales last month as well.

The first customer at the Leicester [store](#), in central Massachusetts, was Stephen Mandile, an Iraq War veteran who has been using medical [marijuana](#) to treat his post-traumatic stress, a traumatic brain injury and chronic pain.

Customers were shuttled to Cultivate, the Leicester store, from a remote parking lot about a mile away as police kept a visible but low-key presence outside. Customers perused offerings kept behind counters and under glass.

Kenny Boisvert, a 33-year-old Blackstone resident, was pleasantly surprised by his purchasing experience.

"It's a very nice place. It's way more than I expected," he said as he waited to pick up edibles and the part of the plant that can be smoked.



Gary Lola, center, purchases recreational marijuana at the Cultivate dispensary on the first day of legal sales, Tuesday, Nov. 20, 2018, in Leicester, Mass. Cultivate is one of the first two shops permitted to sell recreational marijuana in the eastern United States, more than two years after Massachusetts voters approved it in 2016. (AP Photo/Steven Senne)

Mayor David Narkewicz was the ceremonial first customer at New England Treatment Access in Northampton, a small city in the western part of the state known for its eclectic mix of culture.

Narkewicz said he did not intend to consume his purchase, but wanted it as an artifact of city history.

Voters in Northampton approved [recreational marijuana](#) in 2016 by one of the widest margins of any community in the state and officials welcomed the opening of the store, even as many other cities and towns

have thrown up roadblocks to legal marijuana businesses.

George Graham, of Shelton, Connecticut, told Masslive.com he drove up Monday and got in line early at the Northampton store after spending the night at a nearby motel.



A customer purchases recreational marijuana at the Cultivate dispensary on the first day of legal sales, Tuesday, Nov. 20, 2018, in Leicester, Mass. Cultivate is one of the first two shops permitted to sell recreational marijuana in the eastern United States, more than two years after Massachusetts voters approved it in 2016. (AP Photo/Steven Senne)

"Everybody is happy to celebrate. I think it's going to open the door to freedom for a lot of people in surrounding states," said Graham, who is registered to use [medical marijuana](#) in Connecticut but said it would be easier and less expensive to buy recreational pot.

Daquaan Hamilton, a 22-year-old student at nearby University of Massachusetts-Amherst, was among the first inside the Northampton store after waiting for hours in show and rain.

"There are a lot of people throughout our history who have done prison time for such minor offenses—like having weed paraphernalia, or having small amounts on them—and the fact that I can walk out of the store right now with this and not be afraid of anything that can happen to me, it's pretty great," Hamilton told The Boston Globe.

Democratic Gov.-elect Ned Lamont of Connecticut supports legalization and hopes it will be a priority for state lawmakers next year.



Cannabis products are displayed at the Cultivate dispensary on the first day of legal recreational marijuana sales, Tuesday, Nov. 20, 2018, in Leicester, Mass. Cultivate is one of the first two shops permitted to sell recreational marijuana in the eastern United States, more than two years after Massachusetts voters approved it in 2016. (AP Photo/Steven Senne)

Maine has also voted to legalize marijuana, though its first stores are not expected to open until next year. Vermont allows adults to use marijuana has no provisions for legal sale.

The rollout of legal pot sales has been slow in Massachusetts, with regulators saying they wanted to make sure it was done safely and without supply shortages that initially plagued other states.

The two shops received final clearance from regulators to open last Friday but were required to wait three days to coordinate traffic and other concerns.

The Cannabis Control Commission, the state's regulatory board, was expected to approve final licenses for two additional stores on Tuesday, but there are still no pot shops ready to open in the greater Boston area, where more than half of the state's population resides.



A customer purchases recreational marijuana at the Cultivate dispensary on the first day of legal sales, Tuesday, Nov. 20, 2018, in Leicester, Mass. Cultivate is one of the first two shops permitted to sell recreational marijuana in the eastern United States, more than two years after Massachusetts voters approved it in 2016. (AP Photo/Steven Senne)



A customer cheers while waiting in line to purchase recreational marijuana at the Cultivate dispensary on the first day of legal sales, Tuesday, Nov. 20, 2018, in Leicester, Mass. Cultivate is one of the first two shops permitted to sell recreational marijuana in the eastern United States, more than two years after Massachusetts voters approved it in 2016. (AP Photo/Steven Senne)



Customers purchase recreational marijuana at the Cultivate dispensary on the first day of legal sales, Tuesday, Nov. 20, 2018, in Leicester, Mass. Cultivate is one of the first two shops permitted to sell recreational marijuana in the eastern United States, more than two years after Massachusetts voters approved it in 2016. (AP Photo/Steven Senne)

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