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SUMMER 2020

THE GALLEY

Meet the mermaid masterminds
behind Sonoma County's
newest collective

STATE OF THE BEES

How to keep your
local hives thriving

CBN FOR ZZZ

The little-known
compound that
helps you sleep



Founder Annie Holman at
the Galley Santa Rosa

Mermaid of Mary Jane

Annie Holman sets sail at the Galley.

TEXT JONAH RASKIN

This past year has not been smooth sailing for the Galley, the super streamlined cannabis manufacturing and distribution company, which was originally slated to open at the end of 2019. CEO Annie Holman, who might be called the “mermaid of marijuana,” had to deal with seismic issues in infrastructure, along with the ever-shifting tides of state regulations. Plus COVID-19 hit like a tsunami and changed almost everyone’s schedule and habits, including Holman’s. Supply chains were affected, plus health and safety measures had to be put in place.

Now, finally the Galley is up and running in Santa Rosa and ready to manufacture cannabis products and to secure shelf space for them at dispensaries. The demand is bigger than ever before—in large part because cannabis has helped eased anxiety and enabled consumers to chill. Consumers have been voting

with their pocketbooks. Clearly they want more. That’s where the Galley has a big role to play.

Holman named her venture the Galley because she comes from what she calls a “fishy background.” Indeed, her family members worked in the lobster business in Maine, where the crustaceans are a big part of the economy and the culture.

The public face of the company, Holman is also the master of marketing, operating mostly behind the scenes. She doesn’t cultivate and harvest cannabis, but rather manufactures and co-manufactures with her partners an array of tinctures, edibles, topicals, salves, gummies, pre-rolls, and more. The task that takes the most time, Holman explains, is counting gummies, putting them into bags, and sealing them. It’s labor intensive and can’t be done by machine, at least not yet.

During the pandemic, the demand for cannabis products, espe-

cially gummies, has soared. Fortunately, Sonoma County and the state of California deemed cannabis industry workers “essential” to the economy. If that hadn’t happened, consumers would have suffered from lack of access to the plant—in the months that lie ahead, it seems likely that things will settle down, while the doors for experimentation will open even wider than before. Holman invites ganjapreneurs to bring their dreams to the Galley. “We’ll work out the kinks,” she says.

Not long ago, on a tour of the 8,300-square-foot space on Sebastopol Road, once occupied by North Coast Fisheries, it looked as if a great deal of work still loomed ahead. “Not so,” says Holman. “It’s just painting and cleanup.”

The vast space, which is broken down into distinct areas, includes a testing lab, commercial kitchen, industrial-sized pantry, packing room, and a comfortable lounge where employees can take a break.

There is also an event center that will make possible Holman's plans to educate the public about the medicinal and recreational benefits of cannabis. Holman thinks of the Galley as a floating campus.

She's a perennial optimist. Her mantra is "go slow, go small, go steady," which might be translated into that ubiquitous and all-encompassing word, "sustainability." For Holman, it means several things: fair wages and health benefits for employees; sourcing local and organic ingredients; and the efficient use of water and other

resources. To be truly sustainable, a business also has to make money, Holman explains.

Given the Galley's ambitious charter for the year ahead, Holman knows she'll have to pace herself. "Sometimes when I arrive for work, I sit in my car and get my head together before going into the building," she says. "I have to be in a good space so I can help everyone else." At the Galley, Holman plays the role of peacemaker. "If there's an issue, I listen to all sides and persuade people to meet somewhere in the middle," she explains.

Before launching her cannabis venture, she visited dozens of dispensaries and tried out a variety of products, hoping to find some that worked for her needs and preferenc-

es. In some ways she felt out of her comfort zone. After all, lobsters, not flowers were in her family tree.

"I didn't know precisely what I was looking for and spent too much money," Holman remembers. For a long time, the name of the game for many consumers, especially guys, was, 'How high can I get for the least amount of money.' In today's marketplace, with its growing consumer base and more elders using cannabis to be healthy, Holman explains that if dispensaries are to be sustainable they'll have to offer experiences that help customers connect to products and services.

When she looks ahead she sees blue skies for the Galley and the whole cannabis world. "I tell people to hang in there," she says. "Things will get better. Pot consumers around the country will know Sonoma cannabis as well as they know Sonoma wine." ■

