

The blunt truth: study shows pot helps brains grow

by Juanita King
The Muse (MUN)

ST. JOHN'S (CUP) -- Supporters of marijuana may finally have an excuse to smoke weed every day. A recent study in the Journal Of Clinical Investigation suggests that smoking pot can make the brain grow.

Though most drugs inhibit the growth of new brain cells, injections of a synthetic cannabinoid have had the opposite effect in mice in a study performed at the University of Saskatchewan. Re-

search on how drugs affect the brain has been critical to addiction treatment, particularly research on the hippocampus.

The hippocampus is an area of the brain essential to memory formation. It is unusual because it grows new neurons over a person's lifetime. Researchers believe these new cells help to improve memory and fight depression and mood disorders.

Many drugs - heroin, cocaine, and the more common alcohol and nicotine - inhibit the growth of these new cells. It was thought that marijuana did the same thing, but this new research sug-

gests otherwise.

Neuropsychiatrist Xia Zhang and a team of researchers study how marijuana-like drugs - known collectively as cannabinoids - act on the brain.

The team tested the effects of HU-210, a potent synthetic cannabinoid similar to a group of compounds found in marijuana. The synthetic version is about 100 times as powerful as THC, the high-inducing compound loved by recreational users.

The researchers found that rats treated with HU-210 on a regular basis showed neurogenesis - the growth of new brain cells in the

hippocampus. A current hypothesis suggests depression may be triggered when the hippocampus grows insufficient numbers of new brain cells. If true, HU-210 could offer a treatment for such mood disorders by stimulating this growth.

Whether this is true for all cannabinoids remains unclear, as HU-210 is only one of many and the HU-210 in the study is highly purified.

"That does not mean that general use in healthy people is beneficial," said Memorial psychology professor William McKim. "We need to learn if this happens in

humans, whether this is useful in healthy people, and whether THC causes it as well."

McKim warns that marijuana disrupts memory and cognition. "These effects can be long-lasting after heavy use," he said. "This makes it difficult to succeed academically if you use it excessively."

"Occasional light use probably does not have very serious consequences. [But], there is some evidence that marijuana smoke might cause cancer."

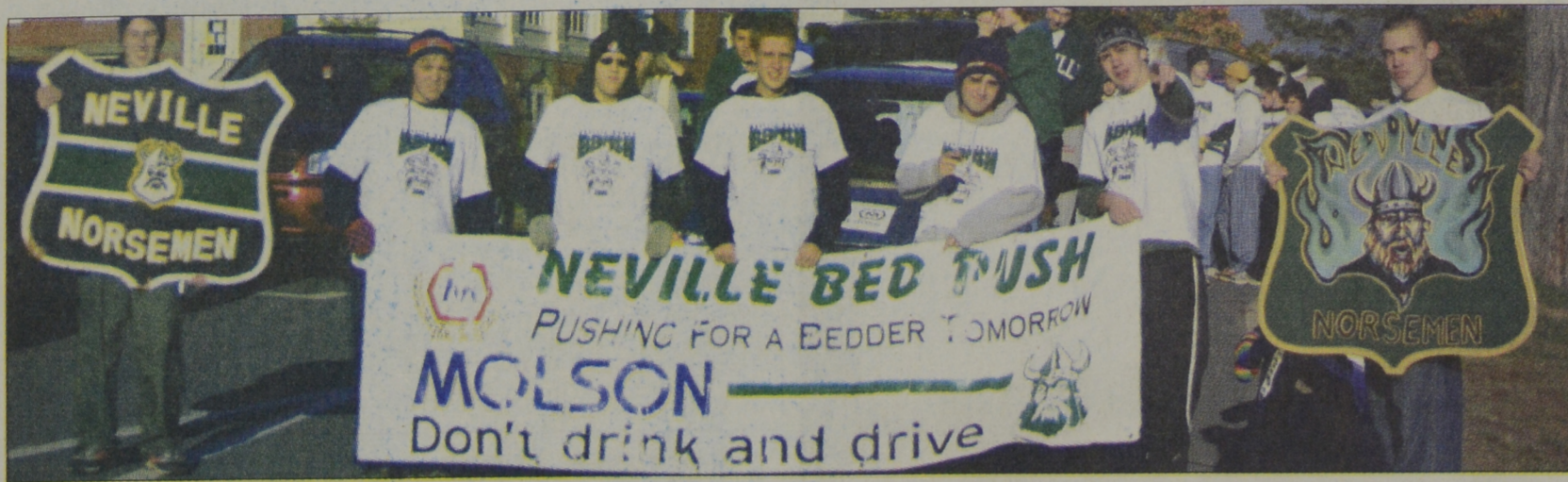
Still, the positive aspects of mar-

ijuana are becoming more plentiful as further research is done. McKim says it's not surprising that THC and compounds like it could have medicinal effects.

"Many have been identified," he said. "It stimulates appetite in people with AIDS, it is an analgesic and blocks nausea in cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy, and it treats the symptoms of glaucoma."

The research group's next studies will examine the more unpleasant side of the drug.

Bed Push sets fundraising record



The annual Neville Norsemen Bed Push raised over \$22,000 for Women in Transition House Inc. by pushing a bed from Saint John to Fredericton.

by Bruns Staff

The thirteenth Neville House Bed Push arrived in Fredericton on the chilly morning of Saturday, October 22. The annual overnight event sees Neville House residents push a wheeled bed from Saint John to Fredericton. More important than pushing a bed over 100 km, though, is the message that Neville, an all-male residence, is pushing: violence against women is wrong. To emphasize that message, Bed Push marks the end of a month-long fundraising effort in support of Women in Transition House, Inc., a local shelter for women and children who are victims of domestic abuse.

Making their way to the Boyce

Farmers' Market, the Norsemen had with them a \$22,000 cheque for the transition house, the largest donation ever to a charity by a UNB residence and well above the \$20,000 target Neville had set. While Neville held fundraising events at the Cellar Pub & Grill and at the Carman Creek Golf Course, the house raised almost all of the money through a massive door-to-door campaign. The success of that, says event coordinator Nick Ouellette, depends greatly on support from the community. "Fredericton has always embraced this event. We have some very generous corporate sponsors such as Molson Breweries and Trius Charter Bus Services, but it really is the link to the community and its residents that allow Neville to raise so much money for such a worthy

cause." Since 1993, the Norsemen have raised over \$130,000 for the transition house.

Pushing a bed from Saint John to Fredericton seems a bit daunting at first, but it becomes a team effort. Groups of four alternate in pushing the bed, and a bus follows, carrying other Norsemen ready to take over when the pushers tire. With support from Sodexo and Tim Horton's, participants have plenty of snacks and water for their journey.

For many residents, Bed Push offers them a unique chance to contribute positively to their community. "The Bed Push itself is fun," says first year Norseman Chris Sullivan, "but the most important thing is collecting the money and raising awareness about the issue."

Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, Margaret-Ann

Blaney, wrote to Neville residents before they began their fundraising and awareness efforts. "We must work together to try to eliminate family violence." An avid Bed Push supporter, the Minister added, "This bed push not only raises funds for this transition house, it also raises awareness and it says that these young men are willing to very publicly speak out against violence against women."

Top fundraiser Tyler Green managed to collect over \$1,300 on his own. This is Tyler's fifth year with Neville, but he was also the top fundraiser when he first began with Bed Push in 2001. For him, the message is clear. "We're a group of young men who won't stand by while women and children are abused. It's largely men who commit these offences, so it's important that men take steps toward eliminating them."



Marc Emery enjoys pot at the Marijuana Party's headquarters in Vancouver.

from painting page 1

of Manhattan in the early 1970s.

"The first real tags were thrown up by some kid, Taki 183. He was a foot messenger and used that to get his name out there. It's still pretty much like that today. You walk miles in a night just to make sure you cover enough ground and spread your tags," says Stevenson.

The culture is based on two things. One is using wild-style - colorful, intricate pieces that take a lot of work, paint, and might take several nights to be completed. The other is spreading the name of a tagger and the name of the crew he or she belongs to in as many locations as possible.

"Yeah man, bombing runs are kinda to mark your territory. To show that a certain crew paints around here," explains Stevenson.

"The crew is like a family, man. We all paint together, sketch together, and get inspiration from one another. Some nights, all of us are out working on bigger pieces and murals around these parts," he says. "It's a great feeling being part of a group of gifted artists that cover nasty looking grey walls with something everyone can enjoy."

But there are two sides to graffiti. Some argue that it is the ultimate expression of art, without borders and restrictions, and free of charge. Some believe that graffiti is vandalism.

"Well, unfortunately graffiti for us, from our perspective is vandalism and damage to property," says Cpl. Martin Gaudet from the Fredericton Police Force. "When we get involved with graffiti, it's someone calling us to advise that their wall or fence has been painted."

In the last few years, graffiti has not been a problem for the city of Fredericton, but it does occur.

"There was a few years where we had a fair amount of graffiti in the downtown core, the walking bridge, and a few buildings," says Gaudet. In order to control, yet support graffiti, the Fredericton Police started the Spray No To Violence campaign.

"The campaign is to repaint tagged surfaces annually, while also encouraging artists to express

themselves in certain areas," says Gaudet.

The campaign encourages teams of graffiti artists to spray on sheets of plywood, which are then displayed behind the Fredericton Library downtown. But some artists had problems with the idea.

"It was difficult to get [the campaign] off the ground, because some people thought it was a catch, it was a trap. 'Sure we'll come forward and spray these four by eight sheets of plywood after you run us on file and arrest us for outstanding warrants,'" says Gaudet.

It was not the intention of the police to go after the graffiti artists. "We acknowledge that it can be art and wanted people to freely express it, just at a given time and given place," he explains.

"When I heard about the campaign, it sounded a little sketchy for my liking. I just don't like to take chances," explains Stevenson. "But I think the campaign is a great idea."

Artists are aware that graffiti is vandalism in the eyes of the police and some of the community and are therefore conscious of where and what they paint. Stevenson explains, "there is a certain level of respect that you must hold for the community in which you make your presence known. I...don't like to promote a negative image of myself."

Profanity and racial slurs have no room in the graffiti culture. The artists are not out to promote hate or settle personal disputes. "It's mostly about the art," says Stevenson.

"It shouldn't take many points of view to recognize good art," says Stevenson. "But I see how the graffiti culture sparks this whole debate whether or not what we do is art or simply vandalism. But there is a lot of warehouses that, you know, are kind of open to the elements already. If I throw a few cans of spray paint around it, it's really not going to make it look a whole lot worse."

In the end, graffiti as art or as vandalism depends on the perspective of the people who will see it. Some think it's a nice change from a gray wall; some believe that no one has the right to paint anywhere on public property.

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