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Ontario native donates his nonfiction cannabis cultivation books to the Community Library

Leslie Thompson The Argus Observer Sep 20, 2018 Updated 14 hrs ago



George Van Patten stands with his IBPA Benjamin Franklin Award in 2016. He earned gold in the Reference category that year. The award goes annually to individuals who “in his or her practice, promoted free and open access to the materials and methods used in the life sciences,” according to information on the IBPA website, and is “regarded as one of the highest national honors for small and independent publishers.”

Photo courtesy of George Van Patten

ONTARIO — An Ontario native, whose father was the driving force to open a new library in Ontario in 1968, just donated some of his own works to the library.

The author, George Van Patten, is the son of the late Dr. C.R. Van Patten, an Ontario chiropractor from about 1948 to sometime in the 1980s, and who also was the chairman of the library board in the late 1960s.

“I followed his lead, and became a writer and book author,” wrote Van Patten of his father in an email to Darlyne Johnson, director of the library. “My father would be proud to have his son’s books in the Ontario Public Library.”

Van Patten grew up in Ontario, and said his father was a member of the school board, the Ontario City Council and was once the chairman of the Democratic Central Committee.

In the book world, George Van Patten is more commonly known as Jorge Cervantes, a pen name he uses when writing his books about cannabis, commonly known as marijuana. He’s written more than 30 non-fiction books, with 20 of them focusing on cannabis and another 10 on “gardening indoors for the straight world,” which include some on organic gardening.

He donated three of his books to the library (actually four, because one title, “Marijuana Horticulture,” is available in English and Spanish). The other titles are “Marijuana Grow Basics” and “The Cannabis Encyclopedia,” the latter of which has sold more than one million copies around the world. The book is available in seven languages.

“They were happy to receive them,” he said during a phone interview about the library’s reaction about the donation.

Darlyne Johnson, director of the library, confirmed the library had received the books.

“We have them, but have not processed them yet,” she said.

Johnson anticipates they’ll be in the nonfiction section and available for checkout “in the next week or two.”

‘I should play on my strengths’

Although nothing is organized just yet, Van Patten — who is in the process of becoming a permanent resident of Barcelona, Spain, where he now lives — is starting to do some satellite work with the grassroots group Malheur CAN! The group successfully petitioned to lift the ban in Ontario on sales of recreational marijuana. The matter now rests in voters hands, and will be decided in November’s General Election.

Van Patten was recently introduced to a member of the group through Ontario resident Mike Miller. The two grew up together, even attending the same church as children, according to Van Patten.

When asked about his thoughts on overturning the ban, he pointed to recent statistics showing Malheur County as the poorest county in Oregon.

“I grew up there and those statistics make me want to throw up. It’s horrible,” he said.

He noticed during a recent class reunion that things had changed in his home town, including the years-long closure of the swimming pool.

Van Patten said dispensary sales would help create needed tax revenue.

“Maybe they can open the swimming pool, maybe give kids some hope,” he said. “Maybe kids won’t be leaving all the time because it won’t be so desolate.”

However, when it comes to cannabis in the political arena, Van Patten said, “I’m a much better writer, teacher and cultivator than activist, so I think I should play on my strengths.”

In that vein, one piece of information he wants people to think about is cannabis receptors that already are in the human body.

“If we have cannabinoid receptors in our body, that proves, or alludes that we manufacture cannabinoids ourselves, in the endocannabinoid system,” Van Patten said.

The system to which he refers, has “regulatory functions in health and disease,” according to a 2006 document from the U.S. National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health.

Furthermore, the paper states that “modulating the activity of the endocannabinoid system turned out to hold therapeutic promise in a wide range of disparate diseases and pathological conditions.”

Sowing the seed

Though he's now dubbed the "most trusted name in marijuana cultivation by High Times magazine, Van Patten said cannabis didn't make in onto his radar until he was about 19.

It was while he was studying at the University of Americas in Mexico that Van Patten discovered it wasn't at all like he'd been told it was while growing up.

"I started smoking cannabis, and had many friends that liked it. They didn't go crazy. They didn't fall off the earth. They didn't start heroin," he said.

When Van Patten returned to the U.S., he got to work sharing his newfound knowledge.

"I thought, 'Well gee, we've been lied to for so long, it's a political issue, not a health issue,'" Van Patten said. "And I thought, I need to work to legalize this and dedicated my life to doing that."

He started growing marijuana, and eventually started growing it indoors in the 1980s. Many people were growing indoors at that time Van Patten said, because there was a "terrible drug war going on. They were putting my friends in jail and many people who didn't deserve to be in jail."

He said the political atmosphere was "difficult," in that "so many people lied and gave partial facts, and really did not know what they were talking about."

So Van Patten learned all he could about growing indoors, and in 1983 independently published his first book, “Indoor Marijuana Horticulture.”

No other company wanted to publish Van Patten’s book, he said, not even cannabis publishers.

“They thought everything had been written [on growing marijuana] ... so I decided to publish it myself since – lo and behold – I have a publishing background.”

Van Patten developed that background when he still lived in Ontario — working for The Argus Observer. He started as a newspaper carrier under former Publisher Phil McNight, and worked at the Argus in later years under former Publisher Fran McLean in the pressroom, the mailroom, the darkroom and the editorial department, for which he was a photographer.

Before he went to Mexico, he went to Spain for a year, and the Argus published his articles about those travels, which he sent via stamped envelope in the mail.

Controversial work led to ‘a double life’

The first edition of his indoor growing guide was printed in Portland.

“I made a deal with Instaprint where I could come in and use the press at night,” Van Patten said. “And that’s what I did, I printed copies then went out and sold them.”

He said his wife “helped immensely” in selling the first 6,000 copies.

It was no easy feat publishing books about a plant that was federally illegal, and Van Patten paid dearly for that, having to wear a disguise for half his career.

“I’ve had to have a double life for the last thirty-five years and it’s just gotten easier recently,” he said, adding that there were several times law enforcement officials would come to his residence in Oregon and Washington to harass him about the books.

Eventually more books were published, and in 1998 Van Patten Publishing was born.

He has no plans to publish future books, as “paper is expensive, and digital is not.” That’s why these days, Van Patten does most of his cultivation education online via his Youtube page, which has 18 million views and 155,000 subscribers, and is an effective way to “talk to the whole world.”

“My feeling is to teach as many people to grow as much cannabis as possible,” he said, adding that he still uses the plant today, although he chooses eating it over smoking.

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