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Humboldt in Time of COVID: Economic Disparities Interview with Michael Kraft - Papa and Barkley

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Papa and Barkley

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Interview with Michael Kraft - Papa and Barkley Business Interviewed by Rebekah (Beks) Baur

Link to interview: https://humboldtstate.zoom.us/rec/share/rhFrDFFPDcFbpohuiJX8VxVI-
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1

00:00:02.730 --> 00:00:07.950

Beks Baur: Okay. Um, so tell me about how your business has

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00:00:07.950 --> 00:00:10.410

Beks Baur: Done in the context of this pandemic?

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00:00:12.630 --> 00:00:16.320

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: That net we've done pretty well, we have,

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00:00:18.090 --> 00:00:32.520

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: our biggest products are wellness oriented topicals and tinctures. Oand so like a little over 50% market share in pain balms. You know, salves you put on achy joints and that kind of thing.

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00:00:33.000 --> 00:00:46.950

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: In California, we've got the number one balm and the number two, last I looked, tincture. So with that part of the business our market share has remained the same, but the whole market has shrunk somewhat.

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00:00:49.620 --> 00:01:08.730

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: Um, but we do have a line of hash products that was fairly small at the start of the pandemic that has been very, very popular for people sheltering in home. And so we've seen a lot of growth on that side. So we've netted out about even.

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00:01:09.810 --> 00:01:17.250

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: We did have some layoffs and furloughs at the beginning of COVID but we are back. Everybody's been back, uh,

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00:01:18.420 --> 00:01:22.800

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: who still works for the company has come back to full time and we're hiring again so.

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00:01:24.150 --> 00:01:29.340

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: Um okay, not great, better than many. I guess would be the short answer.

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00:01:31.110 --> 00:01:46.200

Beks Baur: That's good. Um, has there been any worry about like safety protocols. I know that you stated that you don't really have like a retail business up here anything but would that affect like having to follow safety protocols?

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00:01:46.710 --> 00:01:58.260

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: Absolutely. So we, very early. I mean, we're a manufacturing company that does some food grade manufacturing so we already had people in hair nets and beard nets and gloves.

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00:01:59.670 --> 00:02:05.550

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: We mandated facemasks throughout the license facilities, uh,

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00:02:06.840 --> 00:02:11.370

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: as soon as COVID hit. We're doing a lot more cleaning. We uh,

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00:02:12.480 --> 00:02:20.970

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: use actual isopropal alcohol nearly 100% strength for cleaning. Uh, have for quite a while, but we've upped the frequency of that.

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00:02:23.220 --> 00:02:31.590

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: You know, distanced our workers. We have people working six feet apart, although it's hard to keep people from passing more closely.

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00:02:32.250 --> 00:02:42.840

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: There are times when we've had to make calls that balance one set of regulations against each other or safety concerns against regulation so

00:02:43.260 --> 00:02:51.510

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: some of the cannabis regulations require that we have certain doors closed between, you know, one part of the building and another but COVID

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00:02:51.900 --> 00:02:59.850

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: is better with air flow. So we're choosing to open those doors when we're staffed and have security on site. So those are some of the adjustments that we made.

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00:03:01.980 --> 00:03:02.040

Beks Baur: Okay.

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00:03:03.120 --> 00:03:03.780

Beks Baur: Um,

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00:03:05.190 --> 00:03:18.750

Beks Baur: So it's been rumored since the pandemic began that dispensaries and liquor stores have done well and that perhaps the demand has increased. I know you said that your hash products, uh,

22

00:03:19.620 --> 00:03:30.330

Beks Baur: increased as they weren't really selling as much before then. But since you're a distributor does it mean that you're doing more business with

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00:03:32.010 --> 00:03:33.540

Beks Baur: putting the products around Humboldt?

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00:03:35.580 --> 00:03:45.630

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: You know, the great majority. We've sourced from the Emerald triangle. We get 90% of our cannabis from Humboldt County and the other 10% from Trinity and Mendocino County.

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00:03:46.320 --> 00:03:57.810

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: So that's our biggest footprint locally. Our sales are much more heavily in Los Angeles, in Palm Springs. and Palm Desert; in the Bay Area.

00:03:59.880 --> 00:04:09.720

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: I would agree that dispensaries in general have done pretty well and we distribute to some 500 dispensaries. So we do see a lot of them and

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00:04:10.710 --> 00:04:23.160

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: you know, as I mentioned in the first answer, some of the products are down, but the recreational or quasi recreational and adult youth products are up quite a bit. And I would say,

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00:04:24.840 --> 00:04:32.340

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: for most suppliers who are selling you know most distributors, who are buying flower from the farms and getting out to these dispensaries.

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00:04:33.870 --> 00:04:40.200

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: Um, that they are probably those distributors and most dispensaries are probably up in this pandemic.

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00:04:42.060 --> 00:04:42.450

Beks Baur: Okay.

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00:04:47.910 --> 00:04:58.140

Beks Baur: So this third question is maybe a little bit of a repeat, but has COVID altered the way that you interact with your customers?

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00:04:59.610 --> 00:05:12.240

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: It has. The biggest thing for us, you know, is our customers are the dispensaries and our sales people are not going in and person nearly as much. They're doing guite a bit of

33

00:05:12.750 --> 00:05:22.680

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: maintained relationships by phone, taking orders by phone. Obviously the products don't have to physically get there. So, our delivery drivers

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00:05:23.220 --> 00:05:40.440

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: go into the dispensaries and had always been an important part of our customer service. But you know the we're definitely dealing at the front end at more of a distance. You know, we're doing this rather than walking in and being across the counter from the owner of the dispensary.

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00:05:44.370 --> 00:05:53.250

Beks Baur: Would you say that, um, it makes it more difficult to do business in that way, because it's not as face to face?

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00:05:54.540 --> 00:06:04.020

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: It's certainly different, um, in some ways, less effective. But I don't think it hits us harder than it hits the rest of the economy.

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00:06:06.750 --> 00:06:07.470

Beks Baur: That's good.

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00:06:09.750 --> 00:06:16.050

Beks Baur: Um, so would COVID not be a concern to keep your business open?

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00:06:18.420 --> 00:06:20.160

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: Well, we certainly wanted to go away.

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00:06:22.800 --> 00:06:34.110

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: Like everybody, I mean I have the flexibility personally of either going into my office or not. So I'm at home now. I'll be in the office tomorrow.

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00:06:34.980 --> 00:06:52.140

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: Where I have, you know, there's four of us in a kind of a loft sort of thing. And we're a good 15 feet apart and we've got great ventilation. So I mean everything we do, we're thinking about COVID it and it would be super nice if that was no longer the case. But, um,

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00:06:54.240 --> 00:07:00.390

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: I don't see us, You know, I think, if this were to go on for a long time, we would still...

00:07:01.710 --> 00:07:07.500

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: We would still be able to do our jobs. We'd still be able to supply our customers. I mean, we were certainly

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00:07:08.550 --> 00:07:18.240

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: pleased, both from a sense of a new industry that has been underground being validated by being named this as essential businesses pretty early.

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00:07:19.410 --> 00:07:20.850

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: But also, um,

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00:07:22.110 --> 00:07:26.880

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: just like everybody we would love to get back to something that feels more like normal.

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00:07:28.230 --> 00:07:33.390

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: I don't know if I actually answered your question and that's a lot of words but take another shot at me if you want.

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00:07:35.100 --> 00:07:43.830

Beks Baur: I think you answered it pretty well. So I mean, you're saying that you wouldn't as like a business be worried about any permanent closure?

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00:07:44.820 --> 00:07:55.260

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: Correct. You know I would certainly feel differently if I was a bar or a restaurant and you know I was trying to make it on takeout which I haven't,. You know,

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00:07:55.710 --> 00:08:13.260

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: most of the shops haven't done. Or 25% capacity or even 50% capacity, you know, we're not in that kind of a situation. And when I look at the dispensaries, I think, you know, they're just managing the customer flow. So you know I drive

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00:08:14.400 --> 00:08:32.940

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: on Broadway in Eureka fairly often and there's a relatively new dispensary on the South-ish end of town, and I'll see people, you know, six, eight people lined

up six feet apart, waiting to get in. So I think that's how they've dealt with it. I talked about how we dealt with it.

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00:08:34.080 --> 00:08:48.090

Beks Baur: Yeah, I mean, I've seen in Arcata, cause that's where I live, as I pass like Heart of Humboldt or HPRC I see that they even have lock up windows which can be beneficial.

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00:08:48.390 --> 00:08:48.750

Yeah.

54

00:08:50.250 --> 00:08:58.560

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: I guess I guess the other thing that it's changed a lot. And I'll be curious, or if I were you, I'd be curious to see this.

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00:08:59.070 --> 00:09:12.630

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: You know, Budtenders had played such an important role in educating people and you just don't get the same interaction. When you call in place a delivery, you know, an order for curbside pickup.

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00:09:13.710 --> 00:09:21.060

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: So I would be really interested to know how consumers are getting their information, especially new consumers.

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00:09:39.930 --> 00:09:41.580

Beks Baur: That ringing, are you hearing it.

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00:09:43.350 --> 00:09:44.220

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: I'm not hearing it.

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00:09:49.980 --> 00:09:52.680

Beks Baur: See, I'm using like a new

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00:09:53.730 --> 00:09:56.070 Beks Baur: form of technology so

00:09:59.640 --> 00:10:00.270

And what's that

62

00:10:01.530 --> 00:10:04.440

Beks Baur: So I'm using my computer, instead of my phone.

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00:10:07.110 --> 00:10:08.970 Beks Baur: As I've never had to,

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00:10:12.120 --> 00:10:19.770

Beks Baur: have an interview meeting like this, so it's easier to just use my phone, but in case I needed my computer. It'd be a lot easier.

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00:10:22.620 --> 00:10:27.960

Beks Baur: But I guess that's what I get for new technology. I don't know.

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00:10:29.490 --> 00:10:30.510

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: Do you want to try

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00:10:32.100 --> 00:10:36.750

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: You could call me directly, if you wanted to. Oh but you're recording, I forgot.

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00:10:37.200 --> 00:10:43.560

Beks Baur: Yeah, it went away. It's fine. Yeah, that's also the reason I wasn't able to have my camera on either.

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00:10:44.970 --> 00:10:52.470

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: Yeah, I'm at my house. I don't have really good internet. So I typically turn off the video just to have some bandwidth.

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00:10:53.730 --> 00:10:55.860

Beks Baur: Yeah, I totally understand that.

00:10:58.260 --> 00:11:01.020

Beks Baur: Okay, back to the interview.

72

00:11:04.320 --> 00:11:17.910

Beks Baur: So cannabis isn't federally illegal in the US, but if you needed to as a business. Is it possible that you can receive any like government aid or state aid towards keeping your business open?

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00:11:18.780 --> 00:11:19.710

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: Very little.

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00:11:21.900 --> 00:11:27.660

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: What what we did have I've mentioned that we had some furloughs in the early time of COVID.

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00:11:28.830 --> 00:11:38.250

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: And the one government program that we were able to benefit from and really did take advantage of was work share through the state,

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00:11:39.330 --> 00:11:41.460

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: Employment Development Department, the EDD.

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00:11:42.480 --> 00:11:44.370

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: And what that means is that

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00:11:48.000 --> 00:12:02.520

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: a company can cut someone's hours, keep them on the payroll. The government unemployment will take up a share of their paycheck and so I was one of the people affected by this back in March/April.

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00:12:03.720 --> 00:12:12.510

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: I was cut to three days a week and then raised to four days a week and up until like July sometime.

00:12:13.650 --> 00:12:14.250

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: And,

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00:12:15.300 --> 00:12:26.670

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: when that happened, I got state unemployment. I did get that \$600 federal bump a week. And so, you know, I and many other people

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00:12:28.200 --> 00:12:38.490

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: benefited from that. But nothing really nothing else that the feds did either or, or stated in terms of a stimulus package....

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00:12:39.900 --> 00:12:49.980

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: Or normal, ongoing employment programs were helpful or accessible to us, but that works your program was substantial.

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00:12:51.390 --> 00:12:59.220

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: And the reason that worked was a state program. And so the feds don't have their fingers on it and couldn't tell the state, they can't do it.

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00:13:00.780 --> 00:13:04.230

Beks Baur: Do you think it would be useful if you guys could have received that, um,

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00:13:06.000 --> 00:13:08.580

Beks Baur: more of the federal aid, rather than the state aid?

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00:13:11.070 --> 00:13:19.650

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: Um, yes. For us, kind of, I would say, you know, we're somewhat big we've got. I mean, we're not big in terms like

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00:13:20.790 --> 00:13:28.350

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: Amazon and Google and General Motors are big, but we've got about 180 employees. And

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00:13:30.060 --> 00:13:33.600

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: there, uh, were, certainly have been other things that might have proved useful to us.

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00:13:34.950 --> 00:13:37.500

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: I think the smaller operators,

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00:13:39.420 --> 00:13:43.860

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: especially for a short time, really took it harder.

92

00:13:45.540 --> 00:13:49.500

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: And I think cannabis is in a better place than many but

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00:13:51.570 --> 00:13:57.120

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: absolutely additional resources would have helped us some and probably helped others quite a bit more

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00:14:03.030 --> 00:14:04.440

Beks Baur: All right. Um,

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00:14:06.240 --> 00:14:09.750

Beks Baur: Okay, so you said you had a lot of

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00:14:11.160 --> 00:14:24.270

Beks Baur: Employees. So is the business itself, is it based in Humbolt, or is it like spread out over California since you also do orders to LA and the bay?

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00:14:26.220 --> 00:14:33.120

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: This is, so a cliche way that I shortcut this is to say our "head is in Los Angeles and our heart is in Humboldt.

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00:14:35.250 --> 00:14:45.510

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: Our marketing folks, the majority of our finance folks, our CEO are all in Los Angeles or Pasadena,

00:14:47.100 --> 00:14:58.140

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: but the majority of our employment and all of our production is up here. So all of our manufacturing facilities are in Eureka, about half of our distribution power is in Eureka.

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00:14:59.010 --> 00:15:11.910

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: And then we do have two sets of employees that it's worth knowing about outside of Humboldt and LA Counties, is that we have sales reps and throughout the state and

101

00:15:13.440 --> 00:15:23.880

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: we have a handful of people working remotely just because they can and you know they did before COVID. And then we have a few people who live in other parts of the country.

102

00:15:25.620 --> 00:15:40.320

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: In addition to our THC bearing cannabis products that we sell through dispensaries here in California. We have a hemp only CBD line that we sell through stores like the Vitamin Shoppe and online and the rest of the country.

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00:16:09.390 --> 00:16:12.240

Beks Baur: My headphones are having problems. Again, I'm so sorry.

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00:16:13.350 --> 00:16:14.550

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: All right, well, hang in there.

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00:16:33.330 --> 00:16:48.300

Beks Baur: Okay. Can you hear me now? Okay. Cool. This is weird. I haven't had this happen to me before. Um, can I ask you to possibly repeat what you were saying.

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00:16:49.800 --> 00:16:57.180

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: Okay, so I'm talking about our employees. We've got our marketing, finance, and

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00:16:58.680 --> 00:17:07.800

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: Chief Executive Officer who are in LA County. All of our production and all of our production employees are in Humboldt, in Eureka.

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00:17:08.880 --> 00:17:16.620

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: And then we have some sales reps and other telecommuters in other parts of the states, maybe in state, maybe a dozen of them.

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00:17:17.220 --> 00:17:28.680

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: And we have a handful of people who support our national line which is a hemp CBD line. So in California through dispensaries we sell THC products and obviously we don't

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00:17:29.340 --> 00:17:43.680

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: export THC products across state lines. But we do have a CBD line that mirrors most of the products in our THC line that we sell both online and through stores like the Vitamin Shoppe nationally.

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00:17:46.740 --> 00:17:47.910

Beks Baur: That's neat.

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00:17:48.570 --> 00:17:53.490

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: Yeah, it's, it's kind of rare. We don't, we're not aware of other

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00:17:54.000 --> 00:18:08.940

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: THC companies who are trying to have a presence in the national market and to some extent, we're there because of the market itself, but a lot of it has to do with building out for eventual federal legalization which we do believe it's coming.

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00:18:13.560 --> 00:18:15.960

Beks Baur: Yeah, that's really interesting and

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00:18:17.520 --> 00:18:23.460

Beks Baur: does that provide like more economical benefits would you say?

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00:18:24.660 --> 00:18:32.910

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: Um a little bit. I mean, we're certainly much more profitable with what we sell in California and

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00:18:34.080 --> 00:18:41.160

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: you know, it's really the the economic benefits that we expect will be, you know, a year after

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00:18:42.420 --> 00:19:01.170

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: interstate commerce or some sort of federal legalization hits. You know will have brand recognition in other states will have people already and in other states. So our plan is to be very ready, to be the most ready when federal legalization comes.

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00:19:03.300 --> 00:19:04.830 Beks Baur: It's very strategic.

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00:19:05.790 --> 00:19:19.320

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: We've got a pretty strategic executive group, and I'm not bragging because I'm not one of those people. I just, you know, they, they are doing a good job of trying to suss out the future and position as well for it.

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00:19:22.200 --> 00:19:24.360

Beks Baur: And I know how are you mentioned

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00:19:25.650 --> 00:19:28.800

Beks Baur: how bud tenders, like in person, are beneficial because it

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00:19:30.210 --> 00:19:38.760

Beks Baur: teaches you about the product that you're buying but would you say like it could shift to an online presence in that sense as well?

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00:19:40.080 --> 00:19:55.530

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: I think it can in some, to some extent, it has to, but it's going to be very hard to replicate that. And some of it has to do with the demographics of who are,

125

00:19:56.640 --> 00:20:08.460

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: who is making their first cannabis purchase, you know. So I sent my dad, who is in his 80s to a dispensary in San Bernardino. And he went there

126

00:20:09.240 --> 00:20:17.760

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: to get some of our products. But while he was in there, I mean, he's just a little old guy with a cane who comes in, and so, I mean they treated him.

127

00:20:18.720 --> 00:20:28.050

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: He was very funny. He said it was weird, you know, there was an armed man who got my ID outside and then there was this gorgeous blonde who took down the information

128

00:20:28.830 --> 00:20:45.720

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: and then I went inside and it was really nice inside and they treated me like royalty. And of course they did because either he's a brand new untapped market or, you know, like he's the original cannabis user in California. He's one of those things and so

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00:20:46.740 --> 00:20:57.030

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: when somebody goes to a dispensary who is in their 60s or 70s, and they're just looking to get something to help them sleep or something to help with chronic pain...

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00:20:57.630 --> 00:21:08.250

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: We're very likely to be what they get referred to use. You know, and our biggest sellers don't make you high. You rub them under your elbow and your elbow feels better.

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00:21:09.000 --> 00:21:20.220

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: And so we think of that as kind of owning the first cannabis conversation and getting past some misconceptions and some fear. You know, so my dad's

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00:21:31.950 --> 00:21:32.550 [Feedback] Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: Long

133

00:21:33.720 --> 00:21:36.990

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: For him right as to what else might this do for me

134

00:21:38.100 --> 00:21:48.810

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: and for that customer. I think the budtenders and knowledgeable, approachable budtender is just invaluable and online can't

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00:21:49.920 --> 00:21:51.210

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: replicate most of that.

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00:21:52.950 --> 00:22:01.110

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: Especially for that audience right you know people who are not have not grown up on their phone, or that kind of thing.

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00:22:02.640 --> 00:22:09.570

Beks Baur: Yeah and weed definitely or cannabis gets a bad rep a lot of the time.

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00:22:11.130 --> 00:22:15.600

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: Yeah, it certainly has it's you know it's been very purposeful. So,

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00:22:16.770 --> 00:22:23.880

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: my mom is one of the people who bought into that and still has a lot of vestiges of having bought into that.

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00:22:25.470 --> 00:22:32.190

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: But at some point, you know, people come around and say, "Wow, nothing else helped and that helped me."

141

00:22:37.320 --> 00:22:38.490

Beks Baur: Yeah, I have.

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00:22:39.510 --> 00:22:41.820

Beks Baur: A sibling. That was like that with the,

143

00:22:43.080 --> 00:22:46.560

Beks Baur: salves that you were talking about that you put on your skin.

144

00:22:47.850 --> 00:22:58.140

Beks Baur: She can't use, um, like drugs very much because she's a cancer survivor. So in that sense, it helps her with her pain.

145

00:22:58.680 --> 00:23:00.690

Michael Kraft, Papa & Barkley: Yeah, yeah, that's a classic

146

00:23:02.310 --> 00:23:03.030

Beks Baur: Yeah.

147

00:23:07.080 --> 00:23:10.260

Beks Baur: I feel like I don't have any more questions.

148

00:23:11.280 --> 00:23:13.620

Beks Baur: I feel like you answered all of them very well.