

By Richard J. Bayne
 Times Herald-Record

June 11, 2015 9:01PM

Medicinal marijuana firm starts building before getting state license

TOWN OF WALLKILL - The president of the medicinal marijuana firm Valley Agriceuticals said his company was taking “an educated leap of faith” Thursday as it hosted a groundbreaking ceremony for its planned growing and processing plant before winning state approval.

Valley Agriceuticals President Erik Holling said that although the company is competing with about 40 other firms for five state licenses, it needed to get the project moving. The goal is to get product on the shelves by January 2016. Valley Agriceuticals has submitted its application to the state Health Department. Holling said they expect the state to make its decisions by next month. The Wallkill Town board voted 5-0 to approve the plant at its April 15 meeting.

Valley Agriceuticals has already started building a barn processing facility at the 139-acre site, located at 173 Dosen Road in the Fair Oaks section of the town. The Purchase-based firm plans to only use about 30 acres of the site for its cultivating and processing operation. All the marijuana would be grown in greenhouses, and it would only leave the site in pill or oil form.

Holling declined to give a cost figure, but he said the plan is to build two structures totaling about 100,000 square feet. Company officials said the structures will look like agricultural facilities. Holling said even if New York state were to someday go the way of Colorado and Washington state and approve recreational marijuana use, the plant would still restrict its operations to medicinal marijuana.

Valley Agriceuticals’ director of patient services, Eileen Konieczny, an oncology nurse, had tears in her eyes at the groundbreaking as she talked about how medicinal marijuana eases the suffering of patients going through chemotherapy. Konieczny lost her sister to breast cancer eight years ago. Konieczny, a co-founder of Valley Agriceuticals and a New Paltz resident, played a key role in getting the company to seek out a Hudson Valley site.

Holling said enticements at the Dosen Road site included its location, topography and the fact that it’s totally screened by trees. The operation will not be visible from the roadway, and security fencing will be hidden among the trees, Holling said.

Plus, he said, the town “welcomed us with open arms.”

Throughout the approval process at the town level, Supervisor Dan Depew and other officials repeatedly touched on agricultural preservation issues. Depew had said the property was “absolutely threatened” with development.

Speaking at the groundbreaking, Orange County Executive Steve Neuhaus said he had been skeptical about medicinal marijuana, but then a woman came up to him while he was out shopping one day and told him about her 10-year-old, who was having seizures every half-hour.

“We’re 100 percent behind you,” Neuhaus told the Valley Agriceuticals representatives.

dbayne@th-record.com



From left, Phillip Green, Stephan Ashekian, Eileen Konieczny and Erik Holling of Valley Agriceuticals shovel stone Thursday at the groundbreaking for what they hope will be a medicinal marijuana operation on Dosen Road in the Town of Wallkill. ALLYSE PULLIAM/FOR THE TIMES HERALD-RECORD

<http://www.recordonline.com/article/20150611/NEWS/150619727>