



Photographs by NIC ANTAYA For The Times

**WORKERS** pluck leaves from pot plants during the defoliating process at Pleasantrees, a suburban Detroit cannabis company.

# A pot boom versus a pipe dream

California's legal cannabis system is broken while Michigan's is thriving. What gives?

By Connor Sheets

EVART, Mich. — In this small town in the rural palm of Michigan's mitt-shaped peninsula, a 250,000-square-foot warehouse produces 300,000 cannabis vape cartridges per month.

Wide doors lead off long hallways into brightly lit grow rooms with rows of fragrant weed plants at all stages of development. Workers in hairnets bag cannabis gummies while Green Day blasts in the background. A whirring machine fills, twists and



**TY BERGGREN**, left, buys weed from Ti'Keyha Alexander at Lume Cannabis, which has 1,100 workers and 38 dispensaries in Michigan.

trims more than a dozen joints per minute.

The operation is part of the Lume Cannabis Co. empire, which has 1,100 employees and 38 dispensaries across Michigan. According to chief cultivation officer Kevin Kuethe, Lume is the largest company in the country that produces and sells cannabis exclusively within the bounds of a single state. Lume grew 100,000 pounds last year alone.

When Californians voted to legalize recreational cannabis in 2016, businesses like these — and the tax revenue they generate — were supposed to proliferate. Although some companies have succeeded, the state's weed market is under-performing, beset by competition from illicit operators, steep taxes and what

[See Pot, A5]

## Alarm over lead in Watts water

Mayor calls for more tests after neurotoxin is found in samples from public housing.

By Tony Briscoe

On the heels of an environmental study that found lead-tainted water in public housing developments in Watts, Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass has called on the city's housing authority and largest water utility to conduct further testing for the potent neurotoxin.

The discovery of lead-contaminated tap water in Watts, home to three of Los Angeles' 13 major public housing complexes, has jolted city leadership and raised serious questions about the age of the plumbing that serves low-income residents.

Although California banned the installation of lead pipes in 1985, the average home in Watts is nearly 77 years old, which makes the South L.A. neighborhood more likely to contain corroded lead plumbing.

"It's absolutely unacceptable for families to not have access to safe, clean drinking water," Bass wrote on X.

A team of Southern California researchers collected more than 500 water samples from May through August from the faucets of private homes and public housing units in Watts.

Tap water samples from 20 of these households contained a detectable level of lead. Eight of those samples were taken from properties owned by the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles: five in Nickerson Gardens, two in Jordan Downs and one in Imperial Courts.

Two of the five Nickerson Gardens samples exceeded the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's action levels of 15 parts per billion of lead. The highest concentration at the public housing complex — the city's largest, with 1,066 units — measured 22 parts per billion.

Nickerson Gardens, Imperial Courts and the original portion of Jordan Downs were constructed in the 1940s and 1950s.

Although lead was historically used in plumbing and paint, there is no safe level of exposure. Ingesting or inhaling lead can permanently damage the brains of young children and has been linked to learning disabilities, difficulty concentrating and behavior abnormalities.

Danielle Hoague — a doctoral student at UCLA and lead author of the study, which was funded by the community advocacy group the Better Watts Initiative — said she suspects the problem is much more widespread than what researchers found with a \$40,000 grant.

"It's the compounding effects of environmental injustice that causes harm to the community," Hoague said. "This is a result of malign neglect from public officials, electeds, different agencies of the city, the mayor. This is why Watts continues to be at the bottom of the barrel and continues to experience abject poverty."

"The purpose of this study was to bring attention to this issue," she added. "We don't have any more money

[See Lead, A10]



CHRISTINA HOUSE Los Angeles Times

**DEMOCRAT** Derek Tran has lunch in Little Saigon. He's running against a strong Republican incumbent.

## He identifies with Little Saigon. Is it enough for House?

By Laura J. Nelson

At a solemn reunion in Orange County, dozens of elderly Vietnamese Americans gathered recently to reconnect with others once held at Suoi Mau, a camp where dissidents and American allies were imprisoned after the fall of Saigon.

In the sea of gray hair and faded army uniforms, one younger face stood out: 43-year-old Derek Tran, a Democrat running for Congress.

The 45th Congressional District has the largest population of people of Vietnamese descent outside Vi-

etnam but has never had a Vietnamese American representative in Washington.

Democrats hope Tran can buck that trend. To beat Republican Rep. Michelle Steel, 69, a formidable fundraiser with deep ties to the Orange County GOP, Tran is pushing to win over Vietnamese voters, many of whom have been loyal Republicans since the 1980s.

The November contest is among a handful across the U.S. that both parties see as pivotal in determining control of the next Congress.

After the reunion of former political prisoners, Tran — who was born in the U.S. —

[See Candidate, A10]

## Film industry projects a rosier picture after its summer bounce

By Samantha Masunaga and Christi Carras

Foulmouthed superheroes, babbling Minions and plenty of Anxiety (the animated kind) have propelled this summer's box office past the winter and spring theatrical doldrums, marking one bright spot in an otherwise industrywide gloom.

Boosted by a bevy of sequels, the summer's gross

box office receipts (starting from the first Friday in May) are projected to total roughly \$3.6 billion through the Labor Day weekend, according to Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst at Comscore.

That's short of last year's "Barbie"- and "Oppenheimer"-fueled haul of \$4 billion, but still higher than summer totals in 2022, 2021 and 2020 — a positive sign for theater owners and studio executives who weathered a tough January-to-May stretch of limited and underperforming films.

And with a much-anticipated fall and winter slate of films including "Beetlejuice Beetlejuice," "Wicked" and "Moana 2," industry insiders are sounding more upbeat for the end of the year and beyond.

"If we can carry this same momentum that we have this summer currently into the fall and then into the be-

[See Movies, A7]

### No charges in spat at Arlington

A cemetery official involved in an alleged altercation with Trump campaign staff will not press case. **NATION, A4**

### Educators like cellphone ban

LAUSD schools that have had restrictions in place for years provide a window into the future. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

**Weather** Partly sunny. L.A. Basin: 81/62. **B6**

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### CAMPAIGN SEASON

Kamala Harris visits Savannah, Ga., ahead of the broadcast of her and running mate Tim Walz's CNN interview. For coverage, go to **latimes.com**.



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