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Maintaining this billion dollar industry presents “growing” opportunities - by Glenn Gould

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Glenn Gould, J.C. Cannistraro

You may have more in common with the medical marijuana industry than you thought! Much like your facility, the marijuana grow facilities operate under specific guidelines that require strict attention to detail. The term often used to describe these marijuana farming operations is “grow facility.” While you may not be directly involved with this new industry you can certainly learn from its innovative ways of business and operation. As of November 2012 Massachusetts became the 18th state to legalize medical marijuana. With the advent of legalization several grow facilities have been established and are producing for over 34,000 patients that are registered with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

To produce medical-quality grade marijuana, facilities are managed under very specific and highly regulated operating infrastructures. These grow facilities, much like other critical use-buildings, require continual monitoring of the humidity, carbon dioxide levels, and air changes. The correct equipment and a skilled facilities crew that understands this new, billion dollar industry is paramount for successful operations. As of February 2017, there are 201 registered marijuana dispensaries (RMD) within the state of Massachusetts, according to the Massachusetts Department of Health and Human Services. With the increased demand for medical marijuana, comes an increased need for medical grade grow facilities, and consequently, the likelihood of increased property and operational costs. While inflation and increasing market values are largely unavoidable, negotiating lower fixed rental cost and focusing on energy efficient products and practices are simple ways to save.

As stated, one of the key components of any facility is the team that operates it. Medical marijuana facilities should consider the importance of an accredited, experienced team of technicians that can appropriately manage areas such as air condition, ventilation, energy consumption, waste disposal, cleanliness, lighting, and odor. “Grade A” medical marijuana grow facilities should hire “Grade A” technicians and facility managers; the industry is no longer based out of Mom’s basement! In fact, Massachusetts will be the home to the nation’s largest grow facility at roughly 1 million s/f. AmeriCann, the developer of this and several other grow facilities, indicates that the Massachusetts Medical Cannabis Center (MMCC) will serve as grow space that could be leased or sold to registered growers and have laboratories, corporate offices, and a training center. MMCC will sit on 52 acres and consist of more than just one facility. This space will unquestionably require an industry leading crew to ensure its proper operation. Legitimate grow facilities should be paying just as much attention to their hired or in-house mechanical team as they do their final product.

A deeper dive into what makes the ideal medical marijuana facility management team reveals that these standards have not yet been fully developed. Grow facilities operate within very specific climate tolerances. Depending on the grow facility, you may find specialized split systems, packaged

DX (direct expansion) air handling units, or even chillers. Each of these systems are types of heating, ventilation, and air condition (HVAC) systems. While common, HVAC systems require specific knowledge and training to ensure smooth and proper operations. Routine maintenance greatly reduces the potential for a devastating mechanical failure, resulting in lost dollars, plant damage, and patients without medicine. Owners and managers, especially those without an in-house maintenance team should consider establishing a preventive maintenance plan for all mechanical equipment, with a reputable (fully licensed and accredited) mechanical service provider. Placing the care of mechanical systems in the hands of a responsible crew allows the grow team to focus on their business: producing medical grade marijuana for those in need.

Medical marijuana is a rapidly evolving industry with lucrative opportunities; particularly in Massachusetts. Building owners and tenants who wish to take advantage of this growth should treat their facilities like a hospital, clean room, or data center where attention to detail and critical consideration have been practiced for decades. This is an exciting new industry with unbelievable potential to innovate, provide care and make money!

Glenn Gould is service sales engineer at J.C. Cannistraro, Watertown, Mass.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540