

## FROM THE COVER

PHILLIPS  
from 1A

Phillips said. Their place in that valley kept them out of harm's way, but the more they descended the more damage they saw.

Cracks appeared in the trail and in the buildings they passed on their way down. They met up with two other friends who had hiked to Everest's base camp and back. The foursome returned to Namche Bazaar to find the lodge they had stayed in days before had been destroyed. They contemplated staying in another place, but no one felt safe indoors. They set up camp in an open field with everyone else.

Phillips said it was a sad ending to what had otherwise been a successful trip, the third he's made to Nepal in three years. He had been looking for a place to provide free dental work and had been to Nepal before. In 2007 he had run the Everest Base Camp Marathon, a high-elevation marathon from the base camp to Namche Bazaar.

During the previous two springs he has ventured out into rural areas where basic services like electricity are not a given. This time around he decided to work in Khumjung, inspired some by the avalanche of a year ago that killed 16 Sherpas, four of whom were from Khumjung.

Most of the dental work he offers while in Nepal are extractions, pulling menacing teeth for impoverished residents who

might not otherwise receive that kind of treatment. According to a University of North Carolina estimate there are about 500 dentists to serve the country's nearly 30 million people. About 80 percent of them are in the country's two most populous cities, Kathmandu and Pokhara.

Over 10 days Phillips, with assistance from a Nepalese resident attending dental school in The Philippines, worked on close to 300 patients. After that it was time for the hike.

After the quake the scene was chaotic, and dangerous, Phillips said. The epicenter of the April 25 magnitude-7.8 earthquake was 85 miles away from Namche Bazaar. On Tuesday the village was the epicenter of a magnitude 7.3 quake of its own.

With the danger, the exhaustion from the entire trip and responsibilities at home, the group worked to get home after a night's rest. The itinerary had been to hike 10 miles to Lukla where they would begin their flights home. Four bridges between where they were and where they had to be, though, were in questionable condition. They managed to get a lift in a helicopter, which made the trip in about 10 minutes. The weather prohibited fixed-wing flights out for one day, but they made their scheduled flight the next.

On their way out they began to talk about how soon they could return. For Phillips, he is hoping it can be as soon as this fall. He is in



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO/JEFF PHILLIPS

A resident of Nepal stands outside a building damaged in the April 25 earthquake.

talks with a nonprofit dental program from New Zealand to return and do whatever kind of work is needed in Nepal.

Because he has developed relationships with Seattle's sherpa community, Phillips said when he returns he will have a better idea of where he is needed by getting information from them instead of trying to deal with official bureaucracies. Through social media the

conversations can happen quickly and he can get where he needs to be, he said.

Getting to Nepal will depend on how fundraising goes and how other logistics are addressed. By the time he gets there Nepal will have likely had a tough summer, with higher temperatures creating a feeding ground for waterborne diseases. Residents will be working to rebuild homes, but the poorest

will be among the last to find safe shelter again, Phillips said.

Dental work will be on the to-do list. "I'm pretty fluent in it," Phillips said. Before the earthquakes the outpouring of gratitude for providing the dental work had been overflowing. But if something else takes precedent, he's prepared. "We're taking work gloves and dental gloves," he said. "We're just going to help."

MARIJUANA  
from 1AOVERHAULING  
AN INDUSTRY

Medical marijuana was big business in Washington well before voters legalized recreational use in 2012.

Industry tracker Marijuana Business Daily estimates 500 medical dispensaries are operating in Washington, generating more than \$80 million in annual sales. Online directories list about a dozen medical marijuana outlets in Kitsap County.

Despite legalization of medical marijuana, dispensaries operate in a legal gray area in Washington, said Nick Rodgers, co-founder of Hope Alternative Medicine in Silverdale.

"It's not legal and it's not illegal," Rodgers said. "One reason I was excited for regulation is because it gets that off our backs."

The reform law offers an avenue medical marijuana enterprises like Hope Alternative to become licensed under the recreational system, and obtain endorsements to sell medical products. First priority will be given to medical marijuana providers that applied for recreational licenses, had paid taxes or had been in business for several years.

Rodgers and partner Scott Blevins plan to pursue a retail license, but they don't expect it to be simple. To make the transition, medical marijuana outlets will have to adhere to the same rules placed on recreational retailers, which means locating outside of the 1,000-foot buffer zones established around schools, parks and other places frequented by children.

Recreational marijuana entrepreneurs have already struggled to find allowable locations in the county.

"It really makes it hard," Blevins said.

Those challenges aside, Blevins and Rodgers welcome many reforms the new law will bring to the industry. They expect the law change to shutter most of the fly-by-night gardens and dispensaries that gave the medical marijuana a bad name.

"I think that's a really good thing," Blevins said.

Recreational marijuana retailers are also looking forward to the reforms. Since retail shops began opening last July, prices for recreational marijuana have been significantly higher



PHOTOS BY LARRY STEAGALL/KITSAP SUN

Spenser Haley (left), who suffers from PTSD, gets a smell of marijuana from Scott Blevins, co-owner of the Hope Alternative Medicine in Silverdale. Haley says the medical marijuana helps his symptoms.



Blevins weighs marijuana in his shop. Behind him is co-owner Nick Rodgers.

than prices charged at dispensaries and in the black market, due in large part to excise taxes imposed by the state.

The overhaul of the medical industry should help level the playing field, said Jake Rosner, operations manager at Greenway Marijuana, a recreational shop in Port Orchard.

"Hopefully, business will increase due to less competition," Rosner said in an email. "Patients will be coming to retail stores to 'fill their prescriptions,' thus less competition from previous medical and black markets."

Rosner said Greenway already plans to obtain endorsements for selling to medical patients, as allowed by the new law.

"We will absolutely cater to medical consumers at our

stores," he said.

## PATIENT PERSPECTIVE

While gardens and dispensaries are closed, or shoehorned into the state's

recreational system, authorized medical marijuana patients will still enjoy benefits not available to recreational pot users.

The law creates a

voluntary registry for patients. Those who join will be able to possess up to 3 ounces of marijuana — three times the legal recreational amount — and grow up to six plants at home. Those who don't register will be limited to possessing 1 ounce, but can still grow up to four plants. Patients can also form small growing cooperatives.

Big changes are in store for patients who don't grow their own marijuana. They'll have to purchase their medical products through retail stores with medical endorsements, which could mean paying steep retail prices.

Boyer estimates he spends \$60 to \$80 per month on medical marijuana products. He expects his costs would skyrocket if he has to pay the excise tax

at retail stores. That would be a tough pill to swallow, Boyer said, particularly for patients living on fixed incomes, and those battling serious illnesses like cancer.

The Legislature is considering cutting the excise taxes charged on marijuana. A tax break could also be offered to patients who join the registry.

"If that happens, we'll be able to keep costs low for our medical clients," Rodgers at Hope Alternative said. "But the state has to meet us in the middle somewhere."

Supply of medical marijuana is another concern. With the medical industry rolled into the recreational industry, Rodgers and Blevins fear there will be little incentive for growers to cultivate the strains of marijuana needed to produce the multitude of products used by marijuana patients.

"Our biggest worry is the supply chain," Rodgers said.

The biggest worry for patients has long been losing access to medical marijuana altogether. While overhauling the system, the reform law ensures medical marijuana will remain available to people like Linda Rosenblum of Port Orchard.

Rosenblum recently obtained authorization to buy medical marijuana for her 36-year-old son James, who is developmentally delayed and suffers from frequent seizures. The tinctures have made a huge difference in his quality of life, she said.

"His seizures haven't completely subsided but they're so much better," Rosenblum said.

She hopes the state will settle on a system that keeps medical marijuana affordable and accessible.

"I'm just hopeful it will remain available for people," Rosenblum said. "Because it's just such a need."

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