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Salinas eatery owner seeks Brown's pardon

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Drawing support from local heavyweights, Salinas restaurateur and music promoter David Drew has passed the first hurdle in applying for a governor's pardon for decades-old cocaine and marijuana-dealing convictions. For some, Drew has become a model of what rehabilitation is supposed to look like. For others, his quest for a pardon raises questions about the process, his past, and who deserves the state's absolution for serious crimes.

Drew, 47, quickly received a certificate of rehabilitation from Monterey County Judge Kay Kingsley after submitting his application in November, a key step in soliciting a full pardon from the governor. Drew's attorney Brian Worthington said the court typically asks for further investigation before issuing the certificate, but Kingsley granted Drew's request without it.

Bolstered by letters of support from then-sheriff Mike Kanalakis, Salinas Mayor Dennis Donohue and five others, Drew's petition passed with no opposition from the Monterey County District Attorney's Office. "Mr. Drew has worked very hard to overcome these issues in his life," Worthington said. "The references he has supporting him speak for themselves."

Worthington said Drew would not comment for this story.

Several officers who investigated Drew during his criminal days say they didn't know about the pardon application until after Drew's rehabilitation certificate was approved.

Bob Cooke, a special agent in charge with the California Department of Justice who arrested Drew in the 1990s, said he could hardly believe it when he learned Drew had been granted the certificate.

"Has he contacted the people who are victims of his crimes?" Cooke asked. "If he's trying to prove he's a good, productive citizen, then actions speak much louder than words."

Drew and his supporters say he has reformed and gives time and money to charitable causes.

"I believe I have become an example of rehabilitation and an asset to our community, as well as an upstanding citizen," Drew wrote in his pardon application papers.

"He has become a successful businessperson who routinely contributes to Salinas' quality of life," Donohue wrote on his produce business letterhead.

"He is truly devoted to our city," wrote retired judge John Phillips, director of Rancho Cielo Youth Campus. Worthington said Drew's fundraising for that program especially impressed Kingsley.

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Gary Edwards, a retired Salinas officer who arrested Drew twice in the 1980s, wrote that Drew has hired him for concert security and said he felt Drew "has rehabilitated himself and is unlikely to re-offend."

Kanalakis called him "a man of good moral character," although during last year's sheriff's race he vowed to return an \$800 donation from one of Drew's businesses, saying "I want no connection with them."

State pardons rare

A certificate of rehabilitation is one of several steps toward earning an even rarer state pardon, which could take years.

"With around 16,000 cases a year, if we're getting fewer than 10 (pardon applications) a year, that's an indication of how rare it is," said Chief Deputy District Attorney Terry Spitz.

"Generally, they are not granted," Worthington said.

Because Drew has eight felony convictions in several jurisdictions, his application will have to be approved by the state Supreme Court. It could also go before the Board of Parole Hearings for more investigation before landing on Gov. Jerry Brown's desk.

According to the governor's office, a pardon "is an honor traditionally granted only to individuals who have demonstrated exemplary behavior" and does not expunge a criminal record. Pardoned criminals still have to list all felony convictions when applying for jobs, although they can add that they received a pardon. A pardon makes it possible for some felons to possess firearms, and to obtain certain permits such as liquor licenses. As the self-described owner of Growers Pub in Salinas, Drew could apply for his own alcoholic beverages permit, which, like the pub ownership, is currently held in his girlfriend's name.

Given plenty of breaks

Cooke arrested Drew in the early 1990s and remembers him well.

"When you look over the span of his career, it covered a lot longer period of time" than the decade Drew spent in and out of prison, Cooke said.

In a signed declaration for his pardon application, Drew wrote "it was not until the 1980s that things took a turn for the worse."

He said he "experimented with cocaine. It seemed everyone was doing it and that was the beginning of my downfall."

But Drew's trouble with the law did not begin with his 1980s felony cocaine convictions: a court sentencing report from 1988 showed 10 criminal offenses dating back to 1979, when he was a young teen.

By September 1987, Drew was in his early 20s, and he pleaded guilty to possessing 43 grams of rock cocaine. He was given a second chance and sentenced to probation.

Judge Hartjoon Paik soon regretted the decision.

"It's amazing how I did that," Paik told the court in 1988. "I look back and I say, I gave him all these breaks. This is a long criminal record and it has finally come to a point where probation is not effective."

Two months after Paik gave him his break, police arrested Drew and seized 6 ounces of cocaine in plastic baggies, a Pontiac Trans Am, and \$10,400 in cash found in Drew's coat pocket. Inside his residence, officers seized two 12-gauge shotguns, a .410 gauge shotgun, two Ruger rifles and a revolver, court records show.

In a pre-sentencing report, police said Drew ran cocaine from Los Angeles to dealers in Watsonville and King City while leading an extravagant lifestyle.

"Drew advised that he enjoys putting all of his money in the bathtub and jumping in the middle of the money," the report said.

Drew first denied selling the drug, adding that his \$300-a-week habit had eroded the cartilage in his nose. He pleaded guilty to possession and Paik sentenced him to two years in prison.

"I, like many others, fell to the lure and glamour of money and power," Drew said in his pardon declaration.

By the early 1990s, he was selling larger quantities. In Santa Clara County, Drew was under surveillance when he "dropped 5 kilos in a duffle bag in a restaurant," Cooke said. "Then he ran off and absconded." Cooke said he learned Drew had fled to Mexico but within months was back in California, soon to take part in a 103-pound marijuana deal that, unfortunately for Drew, was set up by undercover agents.

In 1992, he was arrested with 10 others in what authorities called the largest marijuana seizure ever made in Ventura County.

Cooke, still seeking Drew for the cocaine warrant, was alerted. "I got a phone call. He was possibly going to get bonded out, and we wanted to get custody of him on our case."

Drew was using a name he usurped from a Prunedale resident, and Cooke rushed to Ventura County to make the correct identification before he could be released on bail. Drew was convicted in both cases and sentenced to 10 years.

He was released in 1997, but violated parole and was twice sent back to prison, state corrections records show. In September 1998, he left prison for good.

"While laying in my cell I knew that if I got out of prison alive I would never come back," he wrote.

Like a phoenix rising

Drew did well after his last release, quickly building up a string of businesses and buying real estate, including a \$1.5million home in the Las Palmas development south of Salinas. His businesses employ more than 100 people, Drew said in his declaration.

His financial rise began while he was still on parole.

"After six months of saving," Drew wrote, "I bought a semi truck from a friend and started a trucking company."

In the spring of 2000, state records show, he bought a house from Roland Attenborough, a Salinas native who became a prominent entertainment attorney in Los Angeles and incorporated his new trucking company, David Drew Transportation Inc.

He was released from parole in October of the same year.

In 2005, he ventured into concert promotions, starting with smaller acts and eventually bringing top performers to the area, including Mary J. Blige, Poison and Dwight Yoakum.

"I started to think what I could do to make things a little better in our community ... I thought it would be great if I could inspire young people to get involved in music, so I started a production company," he wrote.

In 2007, he bought his \$1.5million home. Records show a \$417,000 mortgage with the remaining \$1.1 million apparently paid in cash.

A year later, county records show he bought The Pub in downtown Salinas, paying the full \$500,000 in cash and investing in its renovation before reopening as Growers Pub in 2009.

Local leaders and the media hailed him as a "hometown hero" and "the ultimate poster child for rehabilitation."

In Drew's application, his businesses are described as altruistic ventures launched to inspire troubled youths, and his support letters bolster that interpretation. His work on a facility to ease produce truck traffic issues and cut fuel bills would "bring jobs to Salinas," former Salinas police officer Joe Gunter wrote.

As the pardon process winds through the courts and the governor's office, other officers hope that next time they'll have a chance to weigh in on whether Drew should receive the state's forgiveness for his crimes.

"I think the pardon process is probably good for someone who got in trouble one time," Cooke said.

"There's a lot of people who have straightened up. But with him, it wasn't because he was a user. He was a drug dealer. His problem was he was fueling the habits that ruin other peoples lives."

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