Marc Gare, now of The Gare Group, is a pioneer of medical marijuana in the State of Connecticut and a Founding Partner of Advanced Grow Labs, one of the state’s four Licensed Producers. In 2019, Advanced Grow Labs was acquired by Green Thumb Industries, a Chicago-based publicly traded Multi-State Operator in the cannabis space.

UNDERSTANDING THIS PLANT IS MIND-BLOWING. MOTHER NATURE IS COMPLICATED. SHE BUILT THIS PLANT, NOT US. WE'RE JUST OFFERING HER BEST WORK.

“I started my first company at sixteen and for the next 30 years, even while running a company, I used to say, ‘I don’t know what I want to do when I grow up.’ Then this came along. The Governor of Connecticut, where I live, was pushing for a medical marijuana program. I knew it would be a pharmaceutical model, which meant the program would be run at the highest level. I knew there was enormous potential for cannabis as a business—what it could do for people. What better combination for an entrepreneur? Researching a pathway that made sense, putting the pieces together, I said, ‘I know what I want to do when I grow up.’ I was 44-years-old.

CONTINUED...
When I was a child and started writing backwards, my parents were like, whoa, what’s up here? It was, ‘You’re dyslexic, you’re hyperactive, you have ADD.’ Being a young boy with hyperactivity and learning disabilities, you compensate in other ways. I lashed out. Created a lot of trouble. My mother tried Ritalin, but she was a naturopath, not a drug person. That stayed with me. I avoid chemical drugs in every way. I don’t even take aspirin. But cannabis allowed me to be introspective—not only to recognize things I didn’t like about myself, but to tackle each one. That’s where my passion came from—understanding that it can be a magical substance—and realizing it can do so much more for people than it did for me.

We’d put together our partnership—the four of us, all friends from growing up—gone to Colorado to see the biggest growers, met with people in the industry and learned as much as we could before submitting our incredible application—1000 pages, copied 26 times—to the regulators in Hartford. On January 26, 2014, we got the call. Dave, on the phone with the Commissioner, gave a thumbs up—we were awarded one of four licenses and it was so exciting, our heads exploded!

On February 6th, there was a press conference with the Governor at a location we’d secured, if we’d gotten the license. All four of the licensed producers were there. After that, it was game on. Go! Go! Go! Building a

“MY PASSION CAME FROM UNDERSTANDING THAT CANNABIS CAN BE A MAGICAL SUBSTANCE—AND REALIZING IT CAN DO SO MUCH MORE FOR PEOPLE THAN IT DID FOR ME”
company that was unique and rewarded our investors. It was very difficult to raise capital at that point. People would say, “No, I’m not putting everything I own on the line to invest in cannabis.” Fast forward three years and people were throwing money at us, but that’s neither here nor there. It just shows how the industry changed in that short period of time.

Every minute was consumed with craziness because the industry was constantly developing and our product was highest level. Generally, our prices were more expensive than our competitors and we maintained a steady 40% market share for years. As partners, we all ran the company, but we each had our own separate responsibilities. Mine was business development, sales and marketing. We had so many aspects of our business—from growing, post-processing, drying, curing to lab materials to the 180 SKUs we created and packaging—because everything went from seed to finished product.

My passion came from being with the dispensary owners and meeting thousands of patients. I started understanding not only what type of ailments are out there, but how cannabis helps. One woman who’d lost her arm from the elbow forward explained Phantom Pain to me. She said, ‘Your brain doesn’t know you have half an arm, so it’s sending signals out to your fingertips. If it doesn’t get a signal back, that’s constant pain. Cannabis relieves that.’ Understanding this plant is mind-blowing. Mother Nature is complicated. She built this plant, not us. We’re just offering her best work.

The future? To me, it looks like what we’ve seen happen in every other industry: Regulation, but hopefully smart regulation that covers social inequities, sustainability and responsible manufacturing. The formation of any new industry is sloppy in the beginning, but Connecticut did it right and became a model for other states around the country.”

Contact Marc at marc@thegaregroup.com