

Transcribed Interview with Aaron Nicholas Manager of Evesham Township's Hollywood Smokin'

Kaitlyn Boyle: "When did you begin vaping?"

Aaron Nicholas: "I started probably February of 2016 when I got the job here. I had a bunch of friends that used to vape and stuff, and I was never really into it, but when I got hired here I just tried a vape and immersed myself into it, so I could learn about it and be able to direct people and help them."

KB: "How long has the vaping industry been coming into fruition?"

AN: "Probably for about the past five years it's been really big. It kinda started off with all of the blu e-cigarettes and little individual draw cigarettes that you can find at your Wawas and 7-11s. And from there it kinda molded into a bigger community with all of the different tanks and batteries and different areas and ways to go. A lot of those blu cigarettes that you can find at Wawa and 7-11, they're directly from big tobacco companies, so those brands are the head honchos that are really trying to push shops like us that have all of our other juices as well as tanks and stuff out of business."

KB: "Do you produce all of the juices here?"

AN: "All of the juice that we have here we get from a company called Flavor West. And then we have all of our of MSDS reports, everything that we have is batch-numbered, so say you wanted to try one of our flavors Kiwi-Honey, you would know exactly what was in it, you would be able to go to Flavorwest.com, hit their MSDS reports and you could see each percent level, nicotine level and each extract."

KB: "I know that there are a lot of vape shops that have popped up recently in this area. Does that create difficulty for competition between the vape shops at all?"

AN: "It depends who you ask. With a lot of shops, like with us, we don't really have a lot of competition. We don't really do a lot of the things that other vape shops do, like blu dream and poppies for example. When they started and even just with these recent regulations that have just passed, they would build atomizers and build coils, RBAs and RDAs that give not people just trying to quit smoking but hobbyists the opportunity to come in and make the biggest clouds and the biggest devices. So back in August of this year, August 8, was when the FDA set all these new regulations which cut out a lot of the things that these other vape shops were able to do, the building, rewrapping batteries to make sure that they're safe for their customers, that kind of stuff. So that kind of impeded on a lot of those other shops, but to answer your question since we didn't do a lot of those building aspects and we just have basic tanks to keep it easy for other people, that was never really something

that we would be in competition with. People who wanted, you know, something a little more custom, more personal, they were always able to go to those other places and if they wanted something easy, simple, they would be able to come here. But at the end of the day, the way I think about it, we're all in it for the same thing. We all want people to be able to make a change and be able to help someone. Some people from some shops are super d****y when it comes to shop to shop, especially in a six-mile radius, and stuff like that. But here, it's no big deal."

KB: "How is the vaping experience different from [that of] traditional cigarettes?"

AN: "It's a huge difference. So I back and forth vape and smoke cigarettes, so at least just the way that I personally feel, before I started vaping, waking up in the morning and not being able to breathe that well, or having a lot of mucus or phlegm. Also smelling [is a sign]; you know you actually smell a lot worse and making the transition over to vaping you really realize all these little things [such as] how you feel waking up in the morning, how different you feel when you're not smoking and you don't have all that tar and nicotine. Also when I'm driving in the car I can smell when other people are smoking a lot more than I was able to before when I would smoke myself. So you know, it's a big difference. It's cool because you can vape inside at some places versus smoking cigarettes and it's kinda iffy depending where you go but it's cool. There's some nice pros and cons about both sides."

KB: "Would you say that beginning vaping was a positive change in your life?"

AN: "Totally. The way I kind of think about it, I didn't go into it saying 'I want to stop smoking cigarettes.' I was kind of like 'I just want to subsidize and if I can cut out one cigarette and transpose that with me vaping I'm good.' If I can just make that little valiant effort to just cut back and go back and forth, not completely quit, but if I can just slowly subsidize one for the other then I felt like I was doing all right. And I mean, it's hard for a lot of other people, people have been smoking for some people have been smoking for 50 years, since they were like 12, so I mean it's all about if you really want to stop."

KB: "What precautions have recently been in place throughout the vaping industry on products and things being sold?"

AN: "There's a bunch of different regulations with what you can and can't do over the counter, as well as what you can and can't say. So like you can't say that 'vaping is better than smoking cigarettes'; there's no proven facts stating that one is good over the other, so as a salesperson I can't say to my customer 'this is better for you than this.' Like I said, the regulations that came down on August 8, that took away all of your building, no more building coils or atomizers, that took away the ability of me to touch anyone else's device. So say you had with you a vape and you

had no idea how to use it and you came in here and you were like “Hey AJ how do I use this can you show me what do i do” I wouldn’t be able to actually touch it. I’m not allowed to touch your device. As soon as I touch your device it’s considered modifying. That got taken away, so I can’t change your coil, fix it, tweak it a little bit. If your tank’s stuck I can’t even unscrew it. So that happened. We also used to be able to give away free samples, with 0 nicotine, just to let people try it; we can’t do that anymore. No more battery wrapping. Sometimes with these batteries after taking them in and out of your device a whole bunch of times the wrapping starts to fray, and we used to be able to wrap batteries. We wrap them so that the power cells can stay safe and not have any internal conduction to fry the regulator inside the vape. With the new law we can’t even do that anymore to make your own battery safe. So ok, your battery’s a little ripped up, you just gotta throw it away and buy a new one. Little stuff like that. It stinks for a place like us, but it really hurts those small mom and pop shops that just vape. We have all of our water pipes, glass, which as time has been going on is just going to become less and less of a taboo. So for us it’s really ok but with all these new regulations for just those vape shops it’s really tough.”

KB: “I know there’s various levels of nicotine that can be in the juices. What are the different levels?”

AN: “We have two blends of juices that we have. We have the 60-40 blend, which is the thinner blend, so the 60% is VG [vegetable glycerine] and the 40% is PG, which is pentylene glycol. All of our bases are pre-mixed, and then we have our extracts that we would top off on the bottles. We start at a zero nicotine level, so you could just get flavor. [With these] you’re gonna get the most flavor. Nicotine gives you a kind of peppery taste so as you increase your nicotine you’re going to get less flavor from your extract. So from zero we go right up to six in our 60-40 blend, and from there we go to 12 milligrams of nicotine, up to 18, and our highest being 24 milligrams of nicotine in our 60-40 bend. Now our other blend that we have is our 90-10 blend. So it’s a lot thicker, and a 90 VG and a 10 PG. And we only go up to six on that, because the high VG produces a lot more clouds. So we start at zero and next we go up to three. Now because it’s a thicker juice and you’re going to get more cloud production, that three really feels like a six, because there’s more nicotine in the smoke, [it’s] more condensed. So the next one we have is a six and that’s the highest we go on our 90-10 juice.”

KB: “What is the most popular for people who are buying juices?”

AN: “The most popular would be the 3’s. If you have a sub-ohm atomizer, a sub-ohm tank, which a lot of people do, they prefer the 90-10. It just helps stop any minor leaking or anything like that as well as it gives you a lot more cloud production. A lot of people who have like the smaller pen devices have to use the 60-40 blend just

because these devices don't generate enough power and enough wattage to be able to burn that juice. So the three and the 90-10 and then probably the six and the twelve in our 60-40 blends would be the most popular."

KB: "About how much is a container of the juice?"

AN: "So our smaller containers are 15 mL and our bigger containers are 30."

KB: "And cost effectiveness wise..."

AN: "Compared to cigarettes? Now it's a little different for me because I feel personally I can go out and kill a pack of cigarettes in a night. Whereas, if I'm vaping, it's not the same for me. But I'll normally have someone come in and get a 30 mL bottle of juice, let's say they come in on a Monday, they'll probably be back Friday, Saturday."

KB: "And how much money does 15 mL or 30 mL cost?"

AN: "Our 15 mL bottles, they cost \$10, \$10.70 after tax. The 30 mL in the 60-40 blend, those are \$20. And then our thicker blend of 90-10 is a little bit more its \$22."

KB: "How much does a vape pen itself cost?"

AN: "It all depends on what you're looking for. We have stuff that you can get your most super basic starter kits start at 20 to 30 bucks. And you can get stuff, like I've seen people just buy batteries that are like \$400, but here we have batteries that are like 90 and 100 bucks and then you also need to get your tank as well which could start at \$25 for a sub-ohm and go up to \$60. So for like a really nice kit, probably \$140 to \$200. For a lower model kit, you'll be spending \$25 to \$80."