

## **MHS students protest against smokeless tobacco sponsor**

If you thought being a part of Students Working Against Tobacco was an easy job, think again. Three McAlester students and three Pittsburg students attended the SWAT Teen Summit: Spit Out Big Tobacco recently and their not-so-easy field assignment was to protest at the US-Smokeless Tobacco's Professional Bull-riding Tour.

"A lot of people were really friendly and some would honk in support, but a few people would spit right as they were walking by or lit up a cigarette," said Pittsburg County Health Department SWAT Coordinator Tippit.

"We had to make signs and walk around the Cox Convention Center three times," said McAlester junior Sara Carpenter. "And we kept getting flipped off and people would be outside smacking their tobacco cans and stuff."

SWAT wasn't there to object to the rodeo itself, only the smokeless tobacco backers that sponsored the PBR tour, said Tippit, and the fact that students gathered for a mutual effort was a success on their side.

"Just to see that many youth in one area doing something so positive, it's just amazing."

Tippit and Carpenter realize many people don't even know SWAT still exists.

"It was a huge deal in eighth grade," said Carpenter. "Now there's not very many people that even know we still have SWAT."

Tippit agreed. "I think a lot of people don't know that SWAT is out there and don't know what SWAT stands for," she said. "So by increasing the media's attention more people will find out what is going on."

The lack of knowledge on tobacco and its effects is another area where SWAT is trying to focus its attention. During the summit more than 400 students and adults from around the state attended various workshops to educate people on policy advocacy topics, media spokesperson training, and tobacco marketing strategies, which focused on the Phillip Morris Tobacco Company idea that "Today's teenager is tomorrow's potential regular customer."

No one knows cigarette company's motives more than Dave Goerlitz, who was a former Winston Man in the 1980s, and who is scheduled to speak at the S. Arch Thompson Auditorium on March 30 at 1 p.m. to follow up the 2007 Kick Butts Day on March 28.

"He worked with R.J. Reynolds and he was one of their lead models," said Tippit.

The Teen Summit is only a stepping stone for the many events SWAT has planned on a local level throughout the year, said Tippit.

"It doesn't just stop at the summit. There is a whole lot more that will be going on."

The next event is set for March 14 for a Southeast Tobacco Free Oklahoma Coalition "Meet and Greet" at Chef Billy's, and the 2007 Kick Butts Day is to follow on March 28.

“We are really trying to get the word out and right now we are trying to find some more adult partners in the McAlester area that would like to volunteer and help and get SWAT rolling again.”

For more information about SWAT or becoming an adult partner contact Tippit at 423-1267.