

Kick butts day

A smoker for 24 years, Dave Goerlitz knows all about the dangers of tobacco use.

Goerlitz, known as “The Winston Man” in the 1980s, was in McAlester Thursday for Kick Butts Day, sponsored by Students Working Against Tobacco and the Southeast Tobacco Free Oklahoma Coalition. He spoke at S. Arch Thompson Auditorium to a full house of sixth, seventh and eighth grade students.

Goerlitz was featured in 42 of the cigarette ads called the “Search and Rescue” series. He spoke in front of a Power-Point display that captured him in several of these ads. “Getting old isn’t any fun,” he said. “But if it takes me standing in front of my picture as the Winston Man in the 1980s to help you kids, I’ll do it.”

Goerlitz said he made \$100,000 a year 25 years ago to be in the ads. “My job was to make men buy cigarettes,” he said, because he looked macho and masculine in the ads.

“We take a product that kills 400,000 people every year and make it look good.”

He also appeared in ads for Ralph Lauren and Vanderbilt. He pointed to one ad for Vanderbilt cologne where he is kissing a female model on the cheek. “I had to kiss her 37 times that day,” he said, and got paid \$25,000 to do it.

In addition, he has been a stunt man for both Harrison Ford and Richard Dean Anderson.

In 1988, Goerlitz quit working for the tobacco industry because he found out some of its tactics to get underage users.

“The tobacco industry must get you early on. The window of opportunity is between 11 and 15. I know about this because I was the Winston Man.

“You know what tobacco can do to you so we’re not going to talk about that.

“We know tobacco kills. We know what’s in it and smokers share those chemicals with those they love.” He said there are 4,700 chemicals in tobacco that can kill a person.

Goerlitz said statistics in Oklahoma show that there are only 21 percent of underage tobacco users. He asked the audience to raise their hands if they thought that number should be closer to 35 percent. The show was almost unanimous. The audience members also thought it was easy for underage users to buy tobacco products as well.

“Tobacco companies are brilliant in what they do. They sell tobacco by making it look good and sound better,” he said.

Other companies add to this with items such as candy cigarettes and bubble gum chewing tobacco. “We are rehearsing them to grow up to use tobacco,” he said.

Goerlitz had a stroke at the age of 34. He doesn’t have much feeling in his left leg and no feeling in the left side of his face. “It’s because of smoking,” he said. It took his brother dying of cancer to finally make him stop smoking—that and the fact his son kept begging him to quit.

Goerlitz told the group this should be a magical journey for them. “Don’t let someone use a wrecking ball and undermine you by telling you tobacco will help you with your problems.

“The tobacco companies don’t care about you or your goals. They want your money.

“It takes more energy to have a lousy life than it does to have a good one,” he said, urging the youths to set goals and then work to achieve them.

In an interview after the assembly, Goerlitz told The McAlester News-Capital that parents who use tobacco should have more concerns for the health of their children.

“We are what we are taught,” he said. “We teach them not to smoke and then they go home and see mom and dad smoke. No wonder they’re confused.”

He urged parents who are addicted to tobacco products to think about their children. “We have to look at what we’re doing. Even if the parent is smoking or chewing, take it outside.

“It give the impression that they’re putting their child above their addiction.”

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