

## **Project SPIT wins state award**

Thursday, 18 October 2007

Project S.P.I.T. (Stop, Prevent and Intervene with Tobacco use), a local tobacco control and prevention program, was presented a Champions of Health award at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City on Monday, Oct. 8. The award was given in the Education and Awareness category and was presented to Jerry Speck, Director, Wendy DeWitt and Becky Seward. The award is sponsored by Blue Cross and Blue Shield, Oklahoma State Department of Health, Oklahoma State Medical Association, Oklahoma Hospital Association, and Oklahoma Osteopathic Association. Miss America 2006 Jennifer Berry was the evening's Master of Ceremonies with J.C. Watts, former US congressman, giving the keynote address.

The Champions of Health awards were created to recognize individuals, health care professionals, legislators and for-profit and non-profit organizations that are working to make a difference in the health of their communities, and to facilitate community partnerships to work toward improving Oklahoma's health status.

Project S.P.I.T. is a Communities of Excellence program working to reduce the burden of suffering disease and death caused by tobacco. Working with school districts, cities, employers and the general public, Project S.P.I.T. and the local turning point coalitions educate youth, lawmakers and specific populations about the dangers of tobacco use. The program targets Choctaw, McCurtain and Pushmataha counties whose percentage of tobacco use ranges from approximately 26 to 34 percent.

Project S.P.I.T. collaborates with media partners like The Antlers American, The McCurtain Gazette, youth organizations such as S.W.A.T. (Students Working Against Tobacco) and adult coalition members to change the attitudes and social norms of tobacco uses. Project S.P.I.T. identifies and educates leading individuals in the area and works to pass governmental and school policies to curb tobacco use. By developing and maintaining partnerships, the program is enhancing and strengthening community resistance to tobacco. The program has been a tremendous success with almost 70 percent of schools in the three-county area adopting 24/7 tobacco-free policies. Project S.P.I.T. continues to wage war against tobacco by winning small victories everyday in the communities of southeastern Oklahoma.