

# THE ANTLERS AMERICAN

## Getting the message out

Friday, 03 April 2009



By Jerry Speck

Pushmataha County Turning Point Coalition

Wow! Almost seventy students, (SWAT ~ Students Working Against Tobacco) from Antlers and Rattan Schools screamed, shouted, carried signs and demonstrated, all in protest of Big Tobacco, last Wednesday! County residents and passersby honked and waved in support of these teams efforts to raise awareness of the deceitful practices of Big Tobacco!

The event hosted by Pushmataha County Turning Point Coalition drew additional support from community volunteers, Antlers Public Schools, the local ESA sorority, APRC, 1st Bank of Antlers, school based social workers from Rattan and Antlers, regional support from McAlester, media support from the Antlers American and K95.5 and help from the Choctaw, McCurtain and Bryan County Health Departments.

Attitudes toward tobacco prevention and cessation are slowly changing in Pushmataha County. When the tobacco program first began over 4 years ago it seemed as if no one, even healthcare professionals, were interested in tobacco control. Now with our helpline numbers dramatically increasing, as well as the number of SWAT (Students Working Against Tobacco) youth escalating to well over 150 students, things are gradually, yet noticeably, improving for southeast Oklahoma. But, we still have a problem . . .

. . . simply said smoking kills! Every year 6000 Oklahomans die from diseases caused by smoking. Seven hundred and fifty of those are secondhand smokers. One in two lifetime smokers will die from their habit. Half of these deaths will occur in middle age.

Tobacco smoke also contributes to a number of cancers. The mixture of nicotine and carbon monoxide in each cigarette smoked temporarily increases the heart rate and blood pressure, straining the heart and blood vessels. This can cause heart attacks and stroke. It slows blood flow, cutting off oxygen to feet and hands. Some smokers end up having their limbs amputated.

For smokers tar coats lungs like soot in a chimney and causes cancer. A 20-a-day smoker breathes in up to a full cup of tar in a year. Changing to low-tar cigarettes does not help because smokers usually take deeper puffs and hold the smoke in for longer, dragging the tar deeper into their lungs. Carbon monoxide robs muscles, brain and body tissue of oxygen, making whole body and especially heart work harder ~ over time airways swell up and let less air into lungs.

Smoking causes disease and is a slow way to die. The strain put on the body by smoking often causes years of suffering. Emphysema is an illness that slowly rots the lungs. People with emphysema often get bronchitis again and again, and suffer lung and heart failure.

Lung cancer from smoking is caused by the tar in tobacco smoke. Men who smoke are ten times more likely to die from lung cancer than non-smokers. Heart disease and strokes are also more common among smokers than non-smokers.

Smoking causes fat deposits to narrow and block blood vessels, which leads to heart attack. Smoking causes around one in five deaths from heart disease. In younger people, three out of four deaths from heart disease are due to smoking.

Are you ready to quit for yourself or just to set a good example for your loved ones? It is time to give up an expensive and deadly habit. PLEASE consider calling 1 800 QUIT-NOW and begin tomorrow with a breath of fresh air.