

THE COLLEGE HILL NEWS

SCCC'S STUDENT NEWSPAPER

'Quit Smoking' Message Is Heard Loud and Clear

By Viktoria-Leigh Wagner

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"When I was a teenager, my friends and I would spray our car windows with cleaner and watch the yellow stain caused by secondhand smoke ooze off."

Cindy Meakem of the Center for Prevention and Counseling shared a memory and a thought. "When we breathe in secondhand smoke, we're breathing in all the carcinogens. Plus, it's disgusting."

On March 4, Cindy gave SCCC smokers a run for their money. With the center four years, she was a smoker herself and quit about six years ago.

"I was smoking on and off probably 10 years," said Meakem. "I started at 13, my mother gave me permission to smoke at 16, and then I quit because it was not fun anymore. I started smoking again in my thirties."

Meakem says it was peer pressure that got her started. "I wanted to look older and cool." "I'd say smoking is the number one preventable death worldwide," she said. Tobacco contains nicotine and 4,000 other cancer causing chemicals, including stearic acid (used in candle wax), ammonia, carbon monoxide, methanol, butane, arsenic, formaldehyde (used to preserve dead bodies) and hydrogen cyanide (gas chamber poison).

According to facts gathered by the center, tobacco kills more than any other substance. 430,000 tobacco users die each year in the U.S., and 4,000,000 die worldwide from tobacco. The 2006 N.J. Smoke-Free Air Act prohibits smoking in any indoor public place and work place. 220 New Jersey municipalities and 12 counties have enacted 248 laws that restrict outdoor smoking in various recreational areas.

"Hackensack was officially smoke-free March 4th and Branchville March 5th," said Meakem. "We reach out to community members who might be interested in creating smoke-free park policies. A community must show interest, then the town council and mayor decide if the town will be smoke-free. It is first introduced as an ordinance and then becomes a law."

Meakem's home is smoke-free.

“My father died when I was 11, my mother when I was 42, my brother-in-law and my sister all from smoking,” said Meakem. Her husband, a smoker for 30 years, had a stroke 12 years ago and then quit within six months.

How did Meakem’s husband quit?

“He wanted to buy a jet ski, and I told him ‘no’ because we didn’t have the money. A year later, he presented me with \$4,000. What I didn’t know was that for the past year, he had been setting aside his two pack-a-day money and saving it in a jar, where it added up. Needless to say, we got that jet-ski. I couldn’t tell him no that time!”

The average smoker spends \$3,000 per year on tobacco products.

Meakem also talked about the new forms of tobacco products. Orbs, for example, are designed to look like breath mints. They contain high amounts of nicotine, and ingesting too many could lead to nicotine poisoning. Tobacco, explains Meakem, is a gateway drug: “Back when I started smoking, a lot of people that I was friendly with started smoking young. We were uneducated, and at that time, we could buy our own cigarettes. There was no age limit.”

It’s estimated that by 2030, more than 10,000,000 will die every year from tobacco-related illnesses.

According to Meakem, secondhand smoke is an issue of its own. Non-smokers exposed to second hand smoke are at the same risk of developing lung cancer, heart disease, bronchitis, asthma and pneumonia as smokers themselves.

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