

# Cancer survivor: ban casino smoke

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Vincent Rennich knows he's lucky to be alive. A lifelong nonsmoker, Rennich was diagnosed with lung cancer in 2006 after 26 years of exposure to secondhand smoke as a casino employee in Atlantic City.

Rennich, 53, who had a third of a lung removed, now works at Dover Downs Casino, a smoke-free casino in Delaware. He's also a high-profile advocate for a nationwide movement to snuff out smoking in casinos.

"I began working in a casino when I was 22 years old," he said. "I never knew it would jeopardize my health. None of us did."

He sued his former employer, the Tropicana Atlantic City, five years ago before settling for \$4.5 million.

Rennich was in Las Vegas on Tuesday to address health experts, lawyers, anti-smoking activists and casino employees during the first National Smokefree Gaming Symposium. The symposium, which concludes today, focused on education and legal strategies to support state-level bans on smoking in casinos.

"It's been an uphill battle, but it will happen hopefully sooner rather than later," he said.

Rennich said the ban against lighting up at Dover Downs Casino has never been an issue with customers, and cleaner air was one of several factors behind an increase in business last year.

The Delaware Gaming Control Board reported that tax revenues jumped 6.8 percent in 2010, to \$243.12 million.

"It's a breath of fresh air working at Dover Downs," he said. "I know I'm very fortunate. Very few people survive lung cancer. I think it's only 14 percent."

According to the American Gaming Association, a minority of the 22 states with commercial and racetrack casinos have outright bans on smoking. Delaware, Maryland and New York are among eight states that ban smoking in all parts of the casino.

"We've started a movement and we will not stop until all gaming workers have a safe, smoke-free workplace," said Stephanie Steinberg, organizer of the symposium and chairwoman of Smoke-Free Gaming of America.

Steinberg stressed it was only "a matter of time" before casinos are smoke-free. The symposium, held at the smoke-free Marriott Springhill Suites, also attracted executives and workers from Native American casinos.

Ben Shelly, president of the Navajo Nation, was honored for his executive order making Navajo tribal lands and tribal casinos smoke free. The Navajo Nation, with 300,000 members, covers parts of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah.

Shelly said he signed the order to "protect the health, wellness and welfare of the Navajo people."

"As leaders we must create safer environments for our people," he said. "We do not want to expose our Navajo people to further unnecessary, health-related illnesses that can be caused by secondhand smoke."

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