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## Belleville celebrates 'Kick Butts Day' and anti-smoking policies

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Third Ward Councilman Vincent Cozzarelli cuts the ribbon acknowledging the ordinance making all Belleville municipal parks and recreation facilities smoke-free as YMCA supervisor Diane Deokarran watches. Gathered with them at the baseball field at Belleville High School is Deputy Police Chief Mark Minichini, Belleville Police Officer Michael Forte and students and volunteers in the YMCA's after-school care program at School No. 7.

Local officials and students got together Thursday, March 10 to celebrate the passage of ordinances last year that are meant to crack down on the use and sale of tobacco in the township.

The event was held just ahead of Kick Butts Day on March 16, a national event

sponsored by the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids to empower kids to stay tobacco-free and express it by participating in a local event.

Last June, the township council approved an ordinance making all Belleville municipal parks and recreation facilities smoke-free. Those areas include public parks, playgrounds and ball fields. The ordinance also banned smoking within 35 feet of any entrance or exit of all municipal buildings.

In December, the council also passed two other tobacco-related laws: one prohibits the sale of tobacco and electronic cigarettes, or e-cigarettes, in town to anyone under 21 years of age, and a second requires local businesses that sell e-cigarettes to register with the Belleville Health Department.

"It's our way to encourage kids to live tobacco-free. In less than one year, Belleville enacted policies to make our town's parks 100 percent smoke-free, require retailers only sell tobacco or e-cigarettes to people 21 years old or older, and require e-cigarette retailers to register with the local health department," said Third Ward Councilman Vincent Cozzarelli Jr.

Belleville was the first municipality in Essex County to raise the age to 21 to buy tobacco products, and require e-cigarette retailers be licensed by the local health department, according to Karen Blumenfeld, Esq., Executive Director of Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy, a Summit-based nonprofit that educates communities on emerging issues in tobacco control.

"With springtime around the corner, we're happy that Belleville wants to promote their smoke-free parks policy," said Blumenfeld.

Belleville's smoking ordinances were spearheaded by Cozzarelli and Deputy Mayor Steven Rovell. The intent was to broaden the township's laws to keep cigarettes and tobacco products away from youth, Rovell said. "The whole thing is to raise awareness. We all have to be cognizant that cigarettes, tobacco products don't help us," he said, noting that they can cause cancer and other health complications. The GASP provided signs to place in parks and recreation areas to make people aware of the smoking ban.

Rovell said enforcement of the ordinances would involve police, but also said people need to be proactive in reporting individuals they see smoking where it's not allowed. "People are afraid to call (the township), and they shouldn't be," he said.

The township and GASP also involved schoolchildren in their efforts. Students in the YMCA's after-school care program at School No. 7 joined the officials on Thursday

afternoon outside the baseball field at Belleville High School to commemorate the township's smoke-free policies. The students spelled out "Belleville NJ Loves Kick Butts Day" in letters colored on white paper, joined by YMCA volunteers and school staff.

"These policies help kids realize that the norm is smoke-free environments. GASP's Art for Health program teaches kids why it's important to live tobacco-free, how tobacco impacts youth and our environment. GASP engaged the YMCA students to create art that was integral to the messaging for today's ribbon-cutting ceremony," stated Blumenfeld.

Other officials at Thursday's ceremony included Deputy Police Chief Mark Minichini, Fire Chief Bob Caruso, schools Superintendent Richard Tomko, Recreation and Cultural Affairs Committee Chair Tom Grolimond and Board of Education Trustee Nelson Barrera.

### **Business and laws**

Belleville Health Officer Colleen Britton said eight businesses in town chose to obtain licenses for selling e-cigarettes after the municipality required it, while 10 business, mostly smaller shops, decided to pull the product from their shelves. The main complaint was that the license, which costs \$1,200 a year, was too expensive, she said.

The next step is for the township and health department to figure out to enforce the ordinances regarding the sale of tobacco and cigarettes, Britton said. Belleville is only the third town in the state to implement the licensing, she said.

The FDA, she noted, hasn't put regulations on the battery-operated e-cigarettes yet, so it's hard to even know how safe they are.

E-cigarettes turn nicotine and other chemicals into a vapor, which are inhaled by the user. According to the FDA's website at [fda.gov](http://fda.gov), only e-cigarettes that are marketed for therapeutic purposes are currently regulated by the FDA Center for Drug Evaluation and Research.

According to The Record, other New Jersey towns that have raised the legal age to 21 for purchasing tobacco include Bergenfield, Bogota, East Rutherford, Englewood, Garfield, Highland Park, Paterson, Princeton, Rutherford, Sayreville, Teaneck, Tenafly, Westwood and Wyckoff.

Lawmakers are considering a bill that would raise the legal age to 21 across the state.

The township council has tabled a separate measure that would ban smoking within 1,000 feet of Belleville's nine school buildings.

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<http://www.northjersey.com/community-news/town-government/township-celebrates-anti-smoking-initiatives-1.1527634?page=2>