

## **PHA smokers beware! Ban is coming**

By Ron Leir

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### **HARRISON –**

The Harrison Housing Authority is in the final stages of upgrading its closed-circuit TV (CCTV) system on the grounds and building hallways by TCBH LLC of Randolph at a cost of \$450,000 from capital funding.

It also has a brand-new “community-safety officer” – Julio “Jules” DePierola – who performs random patrols of the grounds “as additional oversight” at its two public housing sites at The Gardens and Kingsland Court. (He worked a decade as a county juvenile corrections officer.)

So when the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s new nationwide no-smoking policy takes effect, between the cameras and the roving security, seems like it’s going to be tough to publicly puff and get away with it.

Unless Ben Carson, president-elect Trump’s newly named HUD Secretary, negates the new ukase, local Housing Authorities across the country will start enforcing the ban on smoking lit tobacco products (cigarettes, cigars and pipes) in indoor areas, administrative offices and outdoor areas within 25 feet of H.A. buildings.

Electronic cigarettes are not prohibited under the new rules but how to deal with those products is left to the discretion of local housing authorities.

The policy is intended to enhance health and safety within and around H.A. facilities.

Joan Michaelson, HHA director of administration, added that the smoking ban would help save on maintenance costs because apartments would be free of smoke stains and odors.

And, she said, it will “promote health education” and will encourage HHA residents “to work with one another” in smoke cessation classes to be offered by the HHA. “This is really all about controlling the effects of second-hand smoke,” she said.

HHA Executive Director Roy Rogers is solidly behind the new edict, although he’s not entirely unsympathetic to older folks with ingrained smoking habits.

As a former smoker himself, Rogers knows whereof he speaks.

“I was probably 15 when I started,” he said. “I was raised on a farm in central Illinois and the kids smoked cornhusks – you’d roll the husk with the silk inside it, then you’d light it up and puff on it.”

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His dad had been a longtime smoker.

First time he tried it, Rogers recalled, “I got dizzy and had to lay down on the bed.”

But, because of peer pressure, he didn’t put it aside. “You know, I wanted to be part of the game,” he said.

Eventually, Rogers switched to regular tobacco cigarettes.

But after his granddaughter was born, Rogers figured he didn’t want to set a bad example for the next generation and so, after 45 years, he resolved to kick it, cold turkey.

In the beginning, he said, “it was hard – I gained a little weight.” But he’s never looked back.

For those young enough not to have picked up the habit, “I would advise them, ‘Don’t start,’ ” Rogers said. And for those already on the puffing path, Rogers recommended, “Do whatever you can to try and stop to avoid all the different diseases you can be exposed to in a vulnerable state.

“Instead of spending on tobacco products, you’re better off giving your money to charity.”

Rogers added: “I do have a lot of compassion for smokers in the 60-plus age category who are probably in the last house they’ll be living in and we’re saying, ‘we’re going to take that away from you,’ ” [for violating the smoking ban].

“I can’t imagine that we would get to that stage of eviction but it is called for under the law.”

First step to implementing the new rules, according to Michaelson and Rogers, will be a survey of the more than 500 tenants occupying the 268 apartments spread between the two HHA sites.

“I’m going to talk to Jim Doran [HHA board chairman] about working with others in the community to come up with ideas for posters,” said Rogers, to help spread the word about the campaign.

Longtime Harrison Gardens tenant Garry Domerstad, a town DPW retiree, who was out walking his dog last Thursday, told The Observer he quit smoking Kools filtered six years ago but the new edict still rankles.

“I don’t think it’s right,” Domerstad said. “If you’re telling us we can’t smoke inside our apartment or outside, that’s a bad, bad policy.” He estimated that as many as 60% of his fellow tenants are smokers.

<http://www.theobserver.com/2016/12/pha-smokers-beware-ban-is-coming/>