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Upping the price on lighting up for the benefit of all Hoosiers

By **STEVE COOKE**

Deputy Mayor, City of Noblesville



It was one year ago this month that my mom - at the age of 68 - finally quit smoking after 54 years of lighting up, a habit she started at the age of 14.

What it took to break her addiction was a near-death experience from the bed of a hospital room, gasping for breath. I had rushed up to Michigan after hearing she was admitted due to complications from COPD and severely low oxygen levels - and had yet to see any improvement after several days in ICU.

"I quit smoking," she weakly declared to me as soon as I arrived, her voice muffled through the clear plastic oxygen mask. Seeing her in this state and fearing the worst, I

actually laughed. "Well, of course you quit," I said back to her. "I imagine it's kind of hard to smoke with that thing on."

It may have taken a medical emergency to get my mom to quit, but I'm thankful this story had a happy ending. And yet - at what cost to her quality of life and the impact on her fixed income?

Unlike my mom, my dad was able to quit smoking several years ago without much of a fight. Smoking was something he did until, simply enough, he decided not to. I find it amazing how easy it is for some to quit while those like my mom struggle through various treatments, prescriptions, patches, etc.

But whatever it takes to get an individual to quit smoking, one thing is for certain:

Discouraging kids from ever lighting up in the first place is the best way to create a healthier community. Prevention is also the most affordable for all Hoosiers, including employers and health care providers.

Last week at Riverview Health, I joined

a roomful of Hamilton County residents, health care professionals and community and business leaders to hear from the Alliance for a Healthier Indiana - a consortium of organizations and hospitals dedicated to raising the health rankings of Hoosiers.

Indiana is embarrassingly low on many nationwide rankings when it comes to smoking rates, obesity, drug deaths, infant mortality and other measures. In fact, Indiana ranks 39th in the overall health of its citizens. We also rank 39th in the percentage of citizens who smoke and 49th for public health spending.

Other statistics help us understand why our state is doing so poorly when it comes to our health rankings:

- Nearly 1 in 5 Hoosiers still smoke.
- An estimated 95% of smokers start smoking before age 21.
- 15% of Hoosier women smoke while pregnant.

These statistics are not surprising considering Indiana only spent 10 percent of the CDC recommended annual investment for cessation and tobacco control programs in 2014.

That's why as a citizen, I support the tobacco provisions included in Indiana House Bill 1001, which would raise the price of cigarettes and restore funding for Indiana's tobacco cessation and prevention efforts. The \$1 tax currently proposed is a modest increase compared to what was initially proposed in HB 1578, which called for a \$1.50 increase.

I feel nonsmokers already pay more than their fair share with higher premiums on health care coverage to cover the higher cost of treatment that is needed over a smoker's lifetime. Let the people who choose to smoke choose to pay the increased tax.

And when it comes to smoking, price matters. If Indiana's cigarette tax is raised by \$1.50, we would see the following benefits:

- 17.5% percent decrease in youth smoking
- 48,700 youth kept from being adult smokers
- 58,500 current adult smokers would quit
- 30,700 premature smoking-caused deaths prevented

Personally, it's my hope that the Indiana General Assembly will someday support raising the age to legally purchase tobacco products from 18 to 21. With over 4,100 Hoosiers under age 18 becoming addicted each year, raising the minimum age to 21 would stop many new smokers from ever lighting up.

Meanwhile, the cost to treat smoking-related complications continues to increase. As have the health care premiums that we all pay - whether you smoke or not. Companies and individuals are paying a far greater penalty than ever before.

I say "up the price" on lighting up to help those who can't help themselves. And hopefully more Hoosiers won't be forced to quit smoking from a hospital bed, gasping for breath.

BrewBQ coming to Federal Hill Commons

The **REPORTER**

The Noblesville Rotary Club announces the return of their annual "BrewBQ" taking place this year on Saturday, Aug. 19 at the new Federal Hill Commons in downtown Noblesville. The BrewBQ benefits local students who attend Noblesville's Ivy Tech campus. The event will be held from 4-9 p.m.

"We're thrilled to bring back this event for the second year," said Craig Beougher, President-Elect of the Noblesville Rotary Club. "We are excited to be able to host it at Noblesville's new Federal Hill Commons while raising funds for local students."

The Second Annual Noblesville BrewBQ event is sponsored by BlueSky Technology Partners and will feature an amateur BBQ competition, beer supplied by local vendors (included in the price of the ticket), and music throughout the evening.

The musical stage is sponsored by Associated Drywall Partners, Inc. and features Fishers Switch Vibe from 4-6 p.m. and That's What She Said from 7-9 p.m.

For the competition portion, there will be awards from a panel of judges as well as an award based on votes by BrewBQ attendees.

For those interested in participating in the cook-off or event sponsorship, registration is available by visiting <http://www.noblesvillebrewbq.com>.

Tickets will go on sale March 27 at 10 a.m. for \$45 in advance, \$50 at the door. Tickets include unlimited beer and BBQ from 4-9 p.m. There is also a Designated Driver ticket available for \$35, which features water and soda instead of beer.

Event Sponsors include Don Myers Construction, Meyer-Najem Construction, Prairie Lakes Health Campus and Kindred At Home.

About The Noblesville Rotary Club

The Rotary Club of Noblesville was formed in 1955 to contribute to the Noblesville and Cicero communities. The club has directly impacted the local community over the years - most recently starting a scholarship program for Ivy Tech Community College, sponsoring exchange student cultural programs, children's literacy initiatives and assisting the Humane Society's Pets for Vets program. The Rotary Club of Noblesville also regularly welcomes distinguished speakers on a variety of topics.

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