

# Daily Herald

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## State going smoke-free should be celebrated

Posted Saturday, July 28, 2007

They say you can't fight city hall and people can't make a difference. But this week proved them wrong.

We can all take a deep breath now. Illinois will be smoke free Jan. 1.

When the governor signed into law on Monday a statewide ban on smoking in most indoor public places, it was the culmination of an incredible amount of work on the part of many people who previously hadn't been involved in politics.

Adding Illinois to the list of nearly 20 smoke-free states was largely a grass-roots effort. It means people no different from you got involved.

They are people who feel so strongly about something they cart around petitions, spend hours on research and communications with officials, write letters to the editor, attend long governmental meetings and send e-mails to those interested in helping. They badger officials and keep them accountable.

Those are the people to thank for this law.

Smoke-Free Naperville was one group leading the effort to get no-smoking laws enacted, first in our community and then in the state.

In an e-mail to supporters, group President Tony Andrews called Illinois' bill "one of the toughest smoke-free bills in the entire country" and credited his members for helping make it happen.

As an observer of the group's dedication, I add my thanks and wholehearted admiration for its hard work.

The euphoria surrounding this law could only be dampened by the few who are against it.

According to the DuPage County Health Department, in 2000, less than 20 percent of DuPage County residents smoked and less than 14 percent of Naperville residents smoked.

Still, some smokers I know are in favor of the law, noting that being unable to smoke in a bar or restaurant may help them quit and may keep others from starting.

Countless young people begin smoking when they turn 21 because it seems "natural" in bars. It won't anymore. That's a good enough reason to enact such laws.

To the restaurateurs still complaining they will lose revenue, I offer two observations:

Prohibiting smoking on airplanes didn't cause airlines to lose passengers. And what about the many people who will now go to restaurants and, particularly bars and even bowling alleys, who wouldn't before because of the smoke?

When you consider that the vast majority of people are non-smokers, I find it laughable that restaurant owners can say with a straight face they expect to lose business because of this health-related law.

Smoking indoors very soon will be regarded as a strange, stupid thing people used to do and wouldn't dream of doing again.

Why do restaurateurs believe smokers eat out more than non-smokers? Two possible reasons: smokers don't want to make their own kitchens smell or non-smokers don't want to enter their smoky establishments. Perhaps in January, they will find out for sure.

We shouldn't forget the restaurants and bars that were smoke-free before the rest of the crowd. I know I'll remember both the Naperville restaurants that have been smoke-free for years and those restaurant owners who argued against the law, choosing my dining options accordingly.

More than 20 years ago, the newsroom I worked in went smoke-free and I found out for the first time what it was like not to go each day to a job I loved in a smoky, unhealthy environment that, literally, stank. It was a joy restaurant workers in Illinois now will know, though it took too long to get there.

I can't help but believe that each step we take to reduce smoking, including this big one, will help reduce the number of smokers and, most importantly, help keep young people from starting the addictive, deadly habit.

During a time when it has not been easy to be proud of Illinois for many political reasons, this week was a welcome break.

Congratulations, Smoke-Free Illinois and Naperville, for helping lead the way.

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