

Peer Power pushing TNT ideas

By Dani Landskroener

Editor in Chief

Touch No Tobacco, a program funded by the Northeastern North Carolina Partnership for Public Health, is continuing its push using Peer Power students from Hatteras, Manteo and First Flight high schools for tobacco prevention and awareness in Dare County.

One approach the students are using is asking local restaurants to ban smoking indoors.

"As restaurant owners, you have the (ability) to take these ingredients (in cigarettes) out of the air," Deputy Mark McKay said at a breakfast held at The Dunes Restaurant Oct. 26. "It's your decision."

The breakfast, sponsored by Touch No Tobacco, included business owners from all over Dare County who were invited to hear about the benefits of owning and eating at smoke-free restaurants.

"I was getting the restaurant ready to open one morning in 1996 and was putting ashtrays on the tables," said Rufus Pritchard, owner of The Dunes Restaurant. "I thought about the families who are here with children and decided right then and there that my restaurant would be smoke-free. One of my regular customers was very upset with my choice at first but eventually relented and came back saying if he could stop

smoking for an hour at church to pray, he could stop for an hour to eat."

The Dunes Restaurant was the second restaurant on the Outer Banks to become smoke-free.

Richard Welch, co-owner of Tortugas' Lie, spoke at the breakfast about the transition he made a year ago from allowing smoking in his restaurant to banning it completely.

"I co-owned the restaurant for seven years and allowed smoking," Welch said. "We just got fed up with breathing the second-hand smoke for entire shifts. We decided to take a chance and go smoke-free. It turned out to be a great decision. Our patrons and workers have been very appreciative and supportive. It has been a year since we made the decision and food revenue has gone up and we never saw a dip in the number of patrons we serve."

Senior Alaina Lowdermilk has been an employee at Tortugas' since before the change was made and says the transformation has been a positive one.

"There's not many bar crowds (now). (I used to) go home stinking like cigarettes," she said. "(But) for every customer that doesn't like it, there (are) two or three that say they do like it."

Sheriff Rodney Midgett was also supposed to speak; however, due to a family emergency he had to leave town and could not attend the breakfast.

McKay was asked to attend the breakfast in his place and urged the restaurants to take the leap.

"When (Sheriff Midgett) asked me to do this, I jumped at the chance," he said. "Cigarettes killed my mother and are in the process of killing my father."

Sophomore Peer Power student Anna Zappulla also spoke, presenting statistics and arguments for going smoke-free.

"Starting (in restaurants) can help other people," she said.

Peer power students also presented smoke-free certificates to Argyle's Restaurant and Piano Bar, Island Central Grill and Tortugas' Lie.

Currently, there are 92 restaurants in Dare County that have banned inside smoking. In June, a bill to completely outlaw smoking in North Carolina restaurants failed after legislators watered it down.

In further efforts to spread their message, Touch No Tobacco sponsored a Smoke-free Teen Night at The Pit on Oct. 8.

"I was nervous about it," said Lisa Phillips, project coordinator. "I didn't know what to expect."

Phillips got together with The Pit's owner Ben Sproul to arrange the event. Sproul was pleased with the turnout of over 100 teens.

"I started Teen Night as a safe and

wholesome night of fun for the teens," Sproul said. "It has been successful and I thought it would be in everyone's best interest to take things one step further and go smoke-free to make the night more enjoyable for the teens as well as my staff."

According to Phillips, this was the latest in the year The Pit has held a teen night.

Peer Power handed out Quit Kits, which contained candy, gum, reminder cards and support information for those that are trying to kick their smoking habits.

There were also giveaways including two cash prizes, which were won by Manteo Middle School's Shayonne McCleave and Manteo High School's Nick Holley. The Pit will hold another Smoke-free Teen Night on Nov. 25. More prizes will be given away then.

The Nags Head Bowling Alley is also going smoke-free for the night of Nov. 17 in honor of the Great American Smokeout, a nationwide campaign sponsored by the American Cancer Society which challenges smokers to smoke less or quit for the day on the third Thursday of November. Peer Power will also set up a table there and hand out Quit Kits.

"(Take) one day at a time," Phillips said. "(If) you can quit for today, why not quit tomorrow?"