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Smokers asked to quit habit for one day

by Dawn Kurry

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If you plan to quit smoking cigarettes, today may be the day.

The Great American Smoke Out is a nationwide event today, sponsored by the American Cancer Society, and encourages tobacco users to give up their habit for one day in the hopes of inspiring them to make a complete break from tobacco now or in the future.

North Carolina has the highest number of colleges in the nation with voluntarily adopted tobacco-free policies. Half of North Carolina's 58 community colleges have smoke-free policies that protect students and staff from secondhand smoke and help tobacco users quit. The policy protects about 121,300 community college students across the state.

According to Richmond Community College, surveys indicated people did not like having to walk through smoking areas to get into buildings, which caused the college to restrict smoking to the patio area outside the student lounge.

RCC became a tobacco-free campus as of January of this year. Signs announcing the new policy were posted on campus well in advance.

"There wasn't as much resistance as people anticipated," said Admissions Director Daphne Stancil. "It's a good policy. Faculty, staff and students don't have to be exposed to unwanted second-hand smoke. Surveys of all groups indicated a need for us to become a tobacco-free campus."

Stancil serves as the advisor for the Student Government Association and led the transition process. She said the college publicized the change in policy and offered smoking cessation courses for students and employees before implementing the policy.

RCC President Dr. Dale McInnis has met with numerous groups of students in listening sessions and classroom visits over the past few months. He has worked at RCC since 2002.

"The majority of comments I've heard are positive. People appreciate not having to walk through clouds of smoke to get to their eating areas," he said. "If there have been any complaints, they are about people who are not following the rules and are finding places to smoke."

"Tobacco-free policies are the best ways to help tobacco users quit and to protect the health of everyone on campus," said Dr. Adam O. Goldstein, director of the Tobacco Prevention and Evaluation Program at the UNC School of Medicine.

UNC researchers track policy change on college campuses across the state to help promote healthier environments for students and staff as part of the North Carolina Tobacco-Free Initiative. The Initiative, funded by the NC Health and

Wellness Trust Fund, was recognized as a national leader in promoting voluntary policy adoption in the international journal Tobacco Control.

“Changes like these help keep college students and staff healthy,” said Dr. Laura Gerald, HWTF executive director. “We are particularly proud of the efforts of community colleges, which have taken a leadership role in ensuring a stronger, healthier workforce for the state.”

“I think today’s society is more health conscious and our policy fits in with those of restaurants and other public facilities,” McInnis said. “We worked with people to make this transition as smooth as possible. We will always have to remind people we are a tobacco-free campus. When I’ve reminded them, I’ve never received a belligerent or negative response. They have always been gracious and understood.”

For tobacco users who want to quit, free quit coaching is available toll-free from QuitlineNC at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) from 8 a.m. until 3 a.m. every day.

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