

MARYVILLE'S CLEAN INDOOR AIR ORDINANCE

by Jim McDonald

Residents of the northwestern Missouri town of Maryville, Mo. (10,663 pop.), might not think of their hometown as a state leader. But years ago, that's exactly how a pioneer health educator named Stephanie Erdman saw Maryville. Stephanie saw a day where any person might sit down in any restaurant in town and breathe nothing more dangerous than the aroma of good cooking. A local volunteer coalition named Citizens for a Smoke-Free Nodaway County drew upon Stephanie's memory and inspiration in their quest to make Maryville the first town in Missouri to officially ban tobacco smoke from inside all City restaurants.

Flashing forward to early summer, 2003, the Maryville City Council did indeed unanimously approve a smoke-free restaurant ordinance. It took effect the very next day. Maryville officially became the first town in Missouri to ban smoking in all restaurants within city limits. In the following weeks, Maryville would garner statewide and national recognition for their clean indoor air ordinance. The Missouri Association of Community Task Forces chose Citizens for a Smoke-Free Nodaway County as one of four finalists to receive its "Show Me Success" award, presented to local organizations working to make changes in community norms concerning alcohol, tobacco and drug usage. The national organization Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights, based in Berkeley, Calif., awarded the city of Maryville its "100% Smokefree Award of Excellence" for its law that brings smoke-free air to the City's restaurants. The groundwork for all this civic pride and progress was laid many years before by Stephanie Erdman and her colleagues. Needless to say, it took a lot.

Groundwork

For her job as a health educator at the Nodaway County Health Department, Erdman was an early crusader for tobacco use prevention and many who remember her say she was even more. "She was the heart and soul (of tobacco prevention)," is the way Della Rhodes, administrator of the Nodaway County Health Department, remembers her.

"She laid the groundwork for this coalition more than eight years ago," said coalition member Julie Livengood, who also is a health educator with the county. "It just shows that this process takes a lot of time."

The process Livengood refers to is more commonly called local politics. And when they decided to enter the fray, coalition members of Citizens for a Smoke-Free Nodaway County knew the first step would be expanding their roster to embrace a wider range of Maryville residents as well as residents from surrounding towns. The coalition now includes health professionals, educators, students, law enforcement personnel, business people, retirees, community activists and administrators. It's a far cry from the early days of tobacco prevention in Nodaway County when it was just a couple of health educators out knocking on doors.

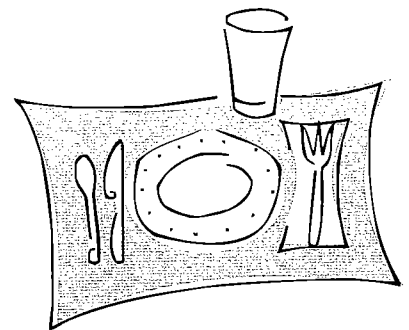
One of Stephanie Erdman's co-workers in those early days was Jamie Baker. Baker still is a member of the coalition, but now she is the state Department of Health and Senior Services' community policy specialist for the Northwest District and Kansas City. Sometime around 1997, she assisted Erdman as she campaigned to prevent youth access to tobacco. Together they produced the area's first smoke-free dining guide. "We

made presentations to the chamber of commerce and all the community service groups and basically any community group that would listen," Baker said.

In 1998, the management of a local landmark, the A & G Restaurant, decided to go smoke-free for the day that commemorates the American Cancer Society's Great American Smoke Out. The experience convinced management that it would be a good idea to go completely smoke-free. "We really were too shy to ask a place like that (the A & G), that seemed to have a lot of smoking," Baker said. "But after that, the A & G became our ace in the hole."

Other establishments followed the lead of the A & G and soon the crusaders could see they had a winning formula.

The next big break came when the chain restaurants started going smoke-free. The local Hardees, for instance, had been a smoker's haven. It was a spot



where long after finishing a meal, folks tended to sit and share – news, views, and secondhand smoke. It was a local tradition, albeit a very unhealthy one.

"When the chain restaurants like Hardees started going (smoke-free)," Baker said, "a lot of coalition members

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started saying, 'Look around, it's how everything's going.' And that's when we all started to get excited," she said. "We started thinking, hey, maybe we can do more."

City Involvement

That's when the Nodaway County coalition members started thinking beyond individual establishments. They invited the mayor to one of their regular coalition meetings and asked him what they needed to do to pass a City ordinance banning smoking in all Maryville restaurants. They were fairly certain the mayor was supportive of their issue based on statements he had made concerning their progress in getting individual restaurants to go smoke-free. Indeed the mayor was supportive and reinforced their confidence concerning how he might vote when the time came.

When invited to make a presentation to the City Council, the coalition members followed the advice they'd been given and decided not to pitch a sample ordinance to the council without first establishing the need. They were concerned that individual councilmen would get hung up on debating legal trivia and lose sight of the ultimate goal-safeguarding public health. So, coalition members opted instead for community involvement and a demonstration of community support. The coalition managed to recruit an impressive lineup of people willing to testify in support of smoke-free restaurants in Maryville.

Several coalition members testified including the coalition's designated spokesperson, Teri Harr, who is the health education coordinator for Saint Francis Hospital. Also, they had a representative from the local health department, members of several local youth groups, letters from other local youth groups, letters from local restaurant owners and the owner/manger of the local Long John Silvers restaurant.

Patience Needed

And even though coalition mem-

bers felt the presentation went very well, they learned that the most important element for success was patience. With all that community support and all the supporting facts, coalition members initially had hoped that the council would just say, okay, draw up an ordinance.

"Didn't happen," Baker said. "Instead, they took the issue 'under advisement.'"

The City Council tabled the issue pending more community input. Then other issues clouded the water. Someone in City Hall found a sample ordinance on the Internet and distributed it.

"It confused the issue," Jamie said, "They thought we were asking for that (particular) ordinance and for things we hadn't asked for."

The confusion turned out to have a positive effect, however, because it stimulated debate and gave coalition members another chance to educate their community. "It led to a good discussion of the

issues," Jamie said. "We got to answer a lot of questions."

The lobbying of City Hall gave coalition members many opportunities to educate their community through the publicity it generated. The local newspapers, both the *City Daily* and the *County Weekly*, ran several feature stories and the largest regional newspaper in nearby St. Joseph printed a front-page story that they also featured on their Web site. The newspaper coverage, combined with press releases the coalition issued, helped generate two lengthy radio interviews.

The issue so dominated the local landscape that the City Council scheduled further testimony and invited all restaurant owners and tobacco prevention advocates to subsequent City Council meetings. Coalition members used these opportunities to demonstrate a high level of community support and to accomplish as much education as possible. And, by the time it came down to a

vote, the City Council unanimously passed the landmark measure, effective the following day.

According to Jamie Baker, the Maryville City Council members did things the right way. "They took their time in learning the facts," Baker said, "and considered all sides of the issue before making their decision. It was their mastery of the issue that allowed them to stand firm in the face of opposition and be 100 percent committed. They are to be commended."

Raised Awareness

Coalition Spokesperson Teri Harr agrees. "Education was the key," she said. "The raised awareness allowed the council members to share in the ownership of this idea. They knew we were asking for something that was good for the community."

Harr says the best piece of advice she could give to the citizens of other communities who would like to accomplish something similar to Maryville

would be to take it slow, be very patient and start with education. "People have to see that your intentions are for the community, not just for your group," she said.

And according to Harr, life in Maryville after passage of the clean air ordinance has affirmed all the hours of hard work put in by its many proponents. She says several restaurant owners have told her that their business has not been affected except for a marked improvement in atmosphere and employee morale. "Owners tell me their buildings are easier to clean and they just have a nicer atmosphere."

No doubt Stephanie Erdman would have been pleased had she lived long enough to see her dream come true. Unfortunately, following a long battle with leukemia, she passed away in late summer of 2002. But, her passion and commitment lives on in the energy of the coalition she helped found and its accomplishments are her legacy. The Maryville City Council has followed the petition of the Citizens for a Smoke-Free

Nodaway County and Maryville is indeed the very first town in Missouri to ban tobacco smoke inside all city restaurants. That's a Maryville Stephanie Erdman could see more than eight years ago. □

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