

COMMUNITY NEWSMAKER | ANDI HANNAH

She strives to make smokers quit

BY DALE MOSS • DMOSS@COURIER-JOURNAL.COM • AUGUST 30, 2009

Edith Wisner smoked even though food tasted like cigarettes and little smelled good. She smoked despite her family's pleas.

She smoked for 55 years — and then met Andi Hannah.

Hannah advised Wisner to quit and provided her aids to accomplish that. Hannah also checked in on her often.

Wisner found the impossible more than possible, after all.

"It was hard now, it was hard," said Wisner, of Jeffersonville. "But Andi was always there. She always would talk to me."



Andi Hannah, coordinator of the Clark County Tobacco Prevention and Cessation Coalition. (By Dale Moss, The Courier-Journal) Aug. 2009

Hannah, 59, creates such former smokers and trusts they will live better and longer. She coordinates the Clark County Tobacco Prevention and Cessation Coalition, a program of Clark Memorial Hospital.

In addition to helping individuals, Hannah has helped businesses, schools and even an entire community go smoke-free. She doesn't win them all, but she delights in progress that she calls significant.

Clark's still-high smoking rate inches down to 27 percent. And statewide, smoking by high school students fell from 23.2 percent to 18.3 percent from 2006 to 2008.

"It's not nice to toot one's own horn," Hannah said. "But toot-toot. This is really big."

Hannah is determined that budget cuts wielded by the cash-strapped state won't bleed that momentum. Indiana will spend about 30 percent less on such stop-smoking efforts at least in the short term.

Two employees now work in Clark, down from a peak of five. But taking heart that most people who smoke wish they didn't, Hannah reorganizes, and her work has even expanded to Scott County.

"That's exactly what I need — that attitude across the state," said Karla Sneegas, who directs the state's tobacco prevention-and-cessation agency.

Sneegas calls Hannah one of the shining stars of the cause. Hannah lends passion, empathy, humor and creativity, Sneegas said.

"Bottom line, she gets the work done," she said.

Along with a shoulder on which Wiser occasionally still leans, Hannah provides smokers with patches and with the phone number to Indiana's quit line. Her office routinely visits fairs and festivals and makes the rounds of businesses and schools. It was instrumental in helping Jeffersonville adopt public-smoking restrictions, though it failed to convince Clarksville.

Another target is Clark's jail.

"I just try to tackle things with gusto," Hannah said.

A divorced mother of two who is active in Eastside Christian Church in Jeffersonville, she grew up in Cleveland and worked much of her adult life in nursing. She saw up close the ravages of smoking. She kicked the habit herself by blowing soapy bubbles.

She and daughter Hilary Hannah also sell furniture at a flea market.

Wiser's belated change helps fuel Andi Hannah, reminding her that the push must continue whatever the budget. Smoking is the leading cause of preventable disease and death, Hannah tells everyone she can.

"It would be lovely if everybody decided to quit smoking and we were out of a job," Hannah said. "That's unlikely."

The coalition's phone number in Jeffersonville is 285-5877.

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