

# LOCALNEWS

## Smokers looking to quit after tax hike

BY SPENSER BICKETT  
Staff Writer

As the price of cigarettes goes up, so does the number of people pledging to kick the habit for good.

The increased cigarette tax that went into effect July 1 in Minnesota created a ripple effect, with the number of smokers looking to quit on the rise. Sandy Anderson, who works at the BP gas station on Third St., and she said she's noticed a little drop in sales, mainly because they're not ordering as many cigarettes during the week as they usually do.

"They think it's kind of ridiculous, they think the prices are too high," she said of customers commenting on the tax hike.

Jessica Johnson at The Loon's Nest on Highway 11 East said some of the store's customers have switched to cheaper brands since the tax increase, but she hasn't noticed an overall change in sales.

"People don't like it, obviously, but they want to smoke still," she said.

The increase of \$1.60 per pack brought Minnesota's cigarette tax to a total of \$2.83 per pack, which is higher than its neighbors. North Dakota's tax is 44 cents per pack, South Dakota's is \$1.53 per pack and Iowa's is \$1.36 per pack. Wisconsin's tax of \$2.52 per pack is closest to Minnesota's rate.

QUITPLAN services, a free cessation, or "stop

smoking" program for Minnesotans, reported a four-fold increase in website and helpline traffic, compared to the same time period in 2012.

ClearWay Minnesota, a nonprofit organization, started QUITPLAN in 2001 as a free service to help Minnesotans quit tobacco. ClearWay also participates in research effects of smoke and second-hand smoke, as a way to help raise awareness and help people live healthier.

QUITPLAN offers online resources like tips, tools, and advice on quitting, as well as a calculator where a tobacco user can find out how much money they'd save by quitting and how much their life will be prolonged by quitting, said Mike Sheldon, communications manager at ClearWay, adding people can email a "quitcoach" for advice and assistance in creating a timetable for quitting, he said.

Sheldon notes that quitting tobacco isn't easy and it's up to the user to set their own goals for quitting.

"It's self-directed, you create your own plan and set your own timetable for quitting," he said. "You're going to get out of it what you put into it."

This increase in traffic isn't just people checking out the services and moving on, Sheldon said. They've had a significant jump in registrants for the program.

"We know from research that a majority

of users want to quit and have tried to quit previously," he said. "So this is a group that's actively trying to quit."

According to Lindsay Barnhart, health educator at the Koochiching County Health Department, there aren't any local resources available for anyone looking to quit using tobacco, but most people in the area have been going online to sites like QUITPLAN and Nicotine Anonymous to find help, she said.

"I'm not an expert, but I am a real person here who has a counseling background," she said. "If (smokers) are motivated (to quit), I can help support and encourage them."

A study published by Tobacco Control in 2002 outlined that increases in tobacco taxes have a strong correlation in increasing the number of tobacco users trying to quit and decreasing the number of people who start using tobacco. The study found that if cigarette prices rise by 10 percent, overall cigarette smoking will fall 2.5-5 percent.

About 3,000 Minnesotans die each year from cancer caused by tobacco use, according to Barnhart, citing an American Cancer Society study. This is both unfortunate and creates a large monetary strain as healthcare costs increase.

"From a health perspective, it's very sad, and it also costs a lot of money."

## MEN AT WORK



STAFF PHOTO BY SPENSER BICKETT

A portion of 13th Avenue between Seventh and 11th Street is under construction for about two weeks, weather permitting, according to International Falls street department officials. Construction crews are stabilizing the road, while adding new curbs, gutters and asphalt.

## Ramping up for annual Ranier Days

BY ERIC MATHEWS  
Staff Intern

Ranier will host its annual summer festival once again with more fun filled events on schedule. This year, there were so many activities planned for visitors, that the festival has been split into two days of fun in the sun.

A new event for the festival is the 'Rugrat Corner' across from Ranier Park, which will have games and prizes for a range of ages. On Friday night, there will be a treasure hunt for kids, but there are only 20 spots available. Those who get there early will get a chance to search for hidden treasures. There will even be a few games for children between

the ages of 1-3, including a game involving cotton balls and the little ones' noses.

"I just wanted there to be games and activities available for the kids, and there haven't been any in the past," said Tammy Taylor, organizer of the Rugrat Corner. "To me, the Ranier Summer Festival is for families, and I wanted there to be something for kids to do." Taylor will be running activities for kids with her daughter.

The festival keeps on rolling with a pancake breakfast 7 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. Saturday at the Ranier Community Building. The breakfast is a fundraiser for the Ranier Recreation Club.

For visitors who want to go with the wind, community sail boat rides will


be given on Rainy Lake by the Rendezvous Yacht Club from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. It is the club's most important day of the year, according to club president Eric Johnson. The club is eager to see local people take an interest in sailing, he said. Voyageurs National Park is offering canoe rides at the Spruce Street dock from 1 a.m. to 4 p.m. for those who would rather pick up a paddle. Visitors can ride in a historically accurate north canoe similar to one the voyageurs used to use.

Attendees can also participate in book signings by local authors and artists; face painting; a balloon toss; a farmers' market; and

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Fri.	Biscuits & Gravy w/eggs & hashbrowns
Sat.	Cinnamon Swirl French Toast with ham & eggs
Sun.	Blueberry Cream Cheese Crepes with eggs & ham

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Mon.	Half Chicken Dinner	\$10.99
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