

Community Change Chronicles

Proud to Serve Great Food and Fresh Air

Process of Creating Change

The Healthy Alamance Smoke-Free Restaurant Campaign reached two milestones in the summer of 2004. First, the number of smoke-free restaurants passed the 40% mark. Days later, the one-hundredth restaurant was added to the ever-expanding list of smoke-free restaurants in Alamance County.

Restaurants go smoke-free for a variety of reasons: increased table turn-over; decreased smoke damage to walls and curtains; or decreased burns on carpets and furniture. Sometimes the reasons are more personal.

When Joel Brown was asked why he decided to make his restaurant in Elon, NC smoke-free, he responded simply, "it's bad for you!" He paused and then added, "To tell you the truth, I've got three teen-aged daughters whom I have tried to discourage from smoking." One day one of them asked, "if smoking is so bad, why do you have a smoking section at the restaurant?" Joel's answer: "We won't tomorrow!" The next day, Joel removed all of the ashtrays and hung up a no smoking sign. To this day, his restaurant, the Sidetrack Grill, has remained 100% smoke-free.

In East Burlington, Boyce Roberts, the owner of Mayberry said, "We went smoke-free on July 4, 2000 because we didn't have an area big enough to allow for a non-smoking section. And we didn't like having smoke in our dining room." Boyce went on to say, "Smoke is not good for my wait staff. Plus, we have more non-smoking customers than smokers." Four years later, his restaurant is still smoke-free.

However, these inspirational stories, and the evidence supporting smoke-free dining as a smart business move, generally do little to sway existing restaurants into changing their policies. Therefore, Alamance targets new restaurants before they open. Restaurant owners are much more likely to consider opening smoke-free than they are to change an existing policy. Frequently, opening smoke-free has not been considered as an option, until the Campaign asks. Knowing that many others within the community are smoke-free makes opening smoke-free a much easier sell to concerned owners and managers. This group is much more open to the positive experiences of others within Alamance. As the number of smoke-free restaurants grows, existing restaurants have begun to follow suit, often with little or no intervention. Collaboration with environmental health inspectors from the Department of Public Health is critical in identifying and contacting new

restaurants before they open. Without that relationship, this strategy is impossible.

Programs that target existing smoking restaurants spend considerable energy surveying patrons and convincing owners to change their policies, often with little or minor success. Smoke-free Sundays and larger no smoking sections are important fallback positions if owners refuse to implement 100% smoke-free policies, but should not be the desired objective of a smoke-free restaurant campaign. However, smaller counties with few new restaurants and staunch smoking holdouts among existing restaurants may have to settle for this approach.

Importance of Change

Given that Alamance had only five no-smoking sections in a 1987 Times-News survey, Alamance has made significant improvement in the area of smoke-free environments. Alamance has consistently averaged one new smoke-free restaurant per month over the first two years of the campaign.

Many of Alamance's greatest strides have been made with new restaurants, which open smoke-free at a rate of two to one.

In addition to decreasing the amount of secondhand smoke to which people are exposed, many smokers working in the restaurant industry have the added advantage of having a smoke-free workplace to motivate them to quit smoking. This is important, given that the number-one reason smokers quit is a smoke-free workplace.

Lessons Learned

- ♥ Target new restaurants before they open. Implementing policies at the outset are easier than changing policies later.
- ♥ The Environmental Health Inspections Department is a valuable ally in identifying new restaurants, distributing literature to all restaurants, and collecting data.
- ♥ Restaurants owners who saw a temporary decline in business experienced resurgence as old customers returned and smoke-free dining attracted new customers.
- ♥ Complaints from non-smokers were a major motivating factor in the decision to become 100% smoke-free in many restaurants.

"One customer even offered to pay extra just in case we lost money by going smoke-free." – Boyce Roberts

Type of Change	Environmental Policy
Risk Factor Addressed	Environmental Tobacco Smoke
Location of Change	Alamance County
Reach/Impact of Change	Restaurant employees and patrons