

# Time to quit smoking – no ands, ifs or butts

BY GLORIA SMITH ZAWASKI  
For the Times Herald-Record

The 36th annual Great American Smokeout is slated for Thursday, and the American Lung Association has teamed up with local health-care providers to offer support for those who decide to give up smoking for that 24-hour period – or better still, for good.

The Great American Smokeout occurs every year on the third Thursday of November during Lung Cancer Awareness Month. That's a week before Thanksgiving, but on this particular Thursday it will be "cold turkey" for millions of Americans who will take a holiday from smoking – the habit that is America's No. 1 preventable cause of death.

## Breaking habit takes time

The American Cancer Society predicts that if this year's participation is like previous ones, approximately one-third of America's 46 million smokers will participate.

"It generally takes seven tries before you succeed at giving up smoking," says Susan Lennon, educational outreach specialist for the American Lung Association in New York. She's hoping that those who tried before will try again – and hopefully quit for good this time.

"Nicotine is a legal drug that's hard to kick," she says. "You can potentially take in nicotine all day long. With other drugs, even legal ones like alcohol, you eventually reach a point where you pass out and stop because you can't take any more. Not so with



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Millions of Americans will take a holiday from smoking on Thursday during the 36th annual Great American Smokeout.

cigarettes. That's one reason that makes fighting such a foe so difficult."

One deterrent to an all-day smoking binge is the price of a pack of cigarettes, Lennon says. The total state tax on cigarettes is now \$4.35, pushing the average cost of a pack up to a price that leaves consumers breathless at point of purchase – \$9.20.

"The state has raised \$10.5 billion in tobacco revenues over the past six years, yet less than 4 percent of that money has been spent on tobacco control programs that help people quit," says Lennon. "Limited funding for these programs means a decrease in coverage in the media that tells people where to

go for help."

Today, 15.5 percent of the population smokes – a rate that is lower than before and trending downwards.

## 443,000 deaths in US each year

But where there's smoke, there is still plenty of reason to put out the fires, Lennon believes. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, cigarette smoking results in more than 443,000 premature deaths in the United States each year – about one in every five U.S. deaths – and an additional 8.6 million people suffer with a serious illness caused by smoking. For every one person

## STOP-SMOKING RESOURCES

### ■ New York Smokers' Quit Line

866-NYQuits (697-8487)

This resource puts smokers in touch with a trained quit counselor. The call center includes motivational messages, provides tips and this year includes a two-week free supply of Nicotine Replacement Therapy, an over-the-counter product commonly known as the patch.

### ■ Counseling sessions

The Orange County Department of Health is offering free counseling sessions. Call 313-9174.

### ■ Nov. 17 activities

#### Orange Regional Medical Center

will have informational tables in the cafeteria of the main campus of its

new facility and also at The Pavilion, the outpatient facility, at 75 Crystal Run Road in the Town of Wallkill, from 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Thursday at both locations.

#### The Greater Hudson Valley Family Health Center

at 147 Lake St. in Newburgh is planning an internal awareness campaign and will provide cessation information on second-hand smoke in English and Spanish. Cessation classes will be held for four consecutive Mondays, beginning Nov. 28. Call 563-8000.

#### The Orange County Department of Health

in conjunction with Orange-Ulster BOCES, is hosting their annual Great American Smokeout art contest, to raise awareness and provide tobacco-cessation information. For more information, call 568-5226.

who dies from smoking, 20 more suffer from at least one serious tobacco-related illness.

The CDC further reports that each year almost 50,000 nonsmokers die from diseases caused by second-hand smoke exposure.

Plus, Lennon says, from a financial perspective, smoking hurts everyone. "Annual smoking-related health-care costs and lost productivity in New York total \$14.2 billion. Smokers average six times more visits to the doctor each year than a nonsmoker," she says.

Most important, of the 2.5 million New Yorkers who still smoke, an estimated 70 percent say they wish they didn't. That

kind of call for help has the American Lung Association of New York on a mission to keep its grant program, POW'R Tobacco Center, alive in spite of a 50 percent funding cut over the past three years.

Serving four counties of the Lower Hudson Valley – Putnam, Orange, Westchester and Rockland – and funded by the New York state Department of Health Tobacco Program, POW'R works closely with health-care providers to keep them up to date about the treatment of tobacco dependence. It also familiarizes the public with the free resources available to assist patients eager to quit.