

Clearing the air

Health Department survey shows 72% of Festus residents strongly support smoke-free workplaces, including restaurants and bars

By Heidi Mayer
For the Leader

Nearly three-quarters of Festus residents surveyed recently by the Jefferson County Health Department said they would strongly support smoke-free workplaces, including restaurants and bars, in the city.

In October, Smoke-Free Jefferson County, a group sponsored by the Health Department, distributed surveys to about 2,800 Festus households. The surveys, which were paid for by a grant the Health Department received from the Missouri Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse, were inserted in the *Jefferson County Leader*. About 240 of the surveys were returned.

Cassie Worley, Tobacco Control Coordinator for the Health Department said she was pleased with the number of survey responses.

The survey asked four questions pertaining to second-hand smoke. Respondents were asked to answer each

question with one of five responses: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree and don't know.

The survey found 72 percent of respondents said they strongly agreed that they would support smoke-free workplaces, including bars and restaurants.

Worley said 67.6 percent of respondents said they strongly agreed they would eat out the same or more if a smoke-free ordinance were passed in Festus.

She said 77.2 percent of respondents strongly agreed that workplaces, including bars and restaurants, with smoke-free air are healthier for customers and employees, and 76.3 percent strongly agreed that second-hand smoke is harmful to a person's health.

"I was happy to see we had such a high percentage of strongly agree and agree," Worley said.

The city of Arnold passed a smoke-free ordinance in 2004. On the Festus survey, many respondents indicated that they travel to restaurants in Arnold.

"Our family of four often drives to Arnold to eat out at a smoke-free restaurant," a resident wrote.

Ward 4 Festus City Councilman Sam Richards, who is on Smoke-Free Jefferson County, introduced a clean air ordinance at a November City Council meeting that called for two public hearings and a referendum on the April 6 ballot. If the referendum were approved by voters, the council would pass the ordinance.

At the council's Dec. 16 meeting city officials said according to the Missouri Municipal League third-class cities with a city administrator, like Festus, can't put such an initiative issue on the ballot.

Richards said he still hopes to hold a public hearing but one has not been set.

Five of the city's approximately 20 restaurants allow smoking. Those establishments are Tanglefoot, Petit Pate, White Grill, Ruby Tuesday and Waffle House.

Owners and managers of some of those restaurants have spoken out against the proposed Festus ordinance, saying it

would hurt their business.

Gina Settle of Festus, who is a member of Smoke-Free Jefferson County, said she thinks the results of the survey indicate that the Festus City Council should approve a smoke-free ordinance.

"It looks like we are heading in the right direction; the majority are wanting a smoke-free environment," she said. "I think even smokers realize it is bad, especially with all of the education."


Settle said she thinks it is important to protect the rights of non-smokers.

"People who may work there (in a restaurant or bar with smoking) may or may not have a choice," she said.

Settle, who works as a nurse at Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital, said she has seen the effects of second-hand smoke on patients in her career.

Worley said the next step is to continue to educate the public about the dangers of second-hand smoke. She said she plans to speak to local organizations, such as the Kiwanis and Rotary clubs.

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