

## EDITORIAL: Smokers ? a dying breed

Recently, the province of Ontario announced that it plans to strengthen the Smoke-Free Ontario Act to make it illegal to smoke on patios, on public sports fields and near playgrounds as of January 1st, 2015.

The intention is to protect youth from the harmful effects of tobacco. The result may be more closet smokers.

Isn't it common knowledge that when you make things harder to find, or off limits all together, the more desirable they become?

Take for instance your parents' liquor cabinet when you were a teenager. The contents were often found to be watered down when your parents offered a cocktail to visitors. Why? Because you weren't allowed to touch your parents booze, so therefore you did every time they weren't looking (and were nice enough to fill the bottles back up for them).

As a dirty, filthy, smoker myself, I can tell you not being allowed to smoke on patios will force me to stay home more often. Why go up to the local pub or restaurant to spread around my hard earned dollars, if I can stay home, drink for cheap, and smoke in comfort in my own home? Why leave the house at all? (Except, of course, to buy more cigarettes).

The government announcement about the changes to the Smoke-free Ontario Act, brought to the public by Dipika Damerla, Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, included the sentiments, 'we don't expect there to be any long-term effects (to the bottom line) for restaurant owners?'. She made references to a time when smoking was moved to the patio, and restaurateurs panicked about the loss of business then. Damerla said that that loss was never felt.

Bull.

Although we smokers have adjusted to not smoking in malls, in elevators, while waiting in emerg, at our desks at work, in restaurants, or in our cars when there is children under 16 years of age present, the patio is OUR domain.

It perplexes me that the government benefits from taxation on cigarettes, duty from cross-border shipments, and health care dollars to staff, equip and maintain health care facilities designed to assist dying smokers. If they cared so much about the effects of smoking, and preventing future generations from getting started with the habit, then why not make it illegal all together? Because, smoking is a multi-billion dollar a year industry. With all cheques payable to the government.

The government controls the big-tobacco industry and slowly, they are controlling the sub-culture of people who choose to smoke ? no matter the cost (or the price) of their cigarettes.

Shaming smokers into submission and forcing us to withdraw from society so we can smoke in peace and private is a little too 'Big Brother' ? even for Ontario.

I say, if you're really concerned about the long-term health effects of smoking Mr. Government, then stop taxing it. Make smoking illegal. Stop profiting from the death of smokers!

Then, and only then, will I consider quitting smoking.

Next summer, if you can't find me anywhere, I'm on my back deck smoking. Come on by. Smokers are welcome.

**By Wendy Gabrek**