

Woodridge official fans flames for regional smoking ban

But DNA chairman still thinks businesses will take hit

By Katie Foutz
STAFF WRITER

Naperville smokers might have to drive longer to find a tobacco-friendly place to drink or dine if Woodridge ignites a regional smoking ban.

Woodridge Trustee Robert Brandt plans to propose a smoke-free campaign at a Village Board workshop tonight — and he is encouraging six surrounding towns to do the same.

He said local restaurant owners may be sated if they don't have direct competition with Naperville, Bolingbrook, Lisle, Downers Grove, Darien and Lemont for smoking patrons.

"If Woodridge was the only town to do it, it would be a selling point for our restaurants to come to Woodridge because we are smoke-free," Brandt said. "However, some would argue they don't want to go it alone."

Under a new state law, municipalities will have the power to impose a public smoking ban starting Jan. 1, but health officials and restaurant owners are clashing over whether cities should use that power.

Brandt said he would like Woodridge to ban smoking in enclosed areas of bars, restaurants and bowling alleys, although those establishments would be allowed to have patio and sidewalk smoking sections.

"As long as indoor air is clean, that should suffice," he said.

He has posted a model smoke-free ordinance and news about the health risks of secondhand smoke on his Web site, www.robertbrandt.org.

Brandt already has opposition. Jim Bergeron, chairman of the Downtown Naperville Alliance board and owner of Jimmy's Grill and Brick House Pizzeria, said a belt of smoke-free cities would still hurt business.

"I can drive to the other side of Wheaton in, what, 20 minutes?" he said. "People will drive that. People drive to Chicago to go to nice restaurants. People drive to Schaumburg to go to nice restaurants. A regional smoking ban will cause problems."

If lawmakers are worried about public health, they should make smoking illegal, he said. Until then, he has a message for Brandt and Debbie Isbell, president of Smoke-Free Naperville.

"Sit in a nonsmoking area, sit in a nonsmoking restaurant or go to another restaurant," Bergeron said. "She has as much choice as smokers, and most importantly the people who run businesses."

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ON THE NET

Smoke Free Woodridge: www.homestead.com/robertbrandt/smokefree.html