

Anti-smoking message to blossom in Woodridge

By David Wendell

Correspondent

Smoking a health and fire hazard

The students of the Woodridge Community Resource Center's after-school program and Boy Scout Troop 99 are fired up about extinguishing cigarettes. On Tuesday, Oct. 11, as part of National Fire Prevention Week, they will plant a garden on the grounds of Woodridge Fire Station No. 2.

The garden of red tulips is to be a smoke-free zone in the village and a symbol of the dangers of smoking. The idea was conceived by the DuPage County Health Department and adopted by Bridgette Johnson of the Resource Center as a project for the classes held at the Woodridge facility.

Johnson believes it's an appropriate visual image of the hazards of tobacco use, not only as a carcinogen, but also with smoking's additional threat of household fires.

"It's always going to serve as a memory and a constant reminder not to smoke," she said.

Many of the students, most ages 5 through 8, have already been warned about the danger of smoking. Instructors have presented lectures outlining the harmful effects caused by the nicotine and tar in cigarettes.

The children, even at their young age, listened intently, asking serious questions following the seminar.

One, particularly worried about the environment at home, inquired about secondhand smoke.

"When somebody is in another room (smoking), is it safe for me?" he asked.

That's part of the reason for this program, said Tom Freeman, Fire Chief for the Lisle-Woodridge Fire Protection District. He gladly offered the space in front of the fire station when he heard about the garden concept.

"It will make a visual statement to the community of the fire hazard in smoking," Freeman said.

To highlight the importance of the issue, Freeman pointed out the statistics on fires caused by careless smoking. The primary cause of fires in the United States is careless smoking.

"More children die from fires caused by smoking than any other fires,"

Freeman said.

The garden is to be considered an aesthetic advertisement for the cautious use of smoking materials, or as preferred by the fire officials, for quitting smoking altogether.

Freeman believes that by incorporating young people into the process of prevention, it can greatly reduce the occurrence of deadly fires in the future. By hosting this project, he hopes the children look to firefighters for inspiration.

"We're in the business to prevent fires," he said. "It allows us to be role models."

Tom Bennington, a Chicago lawyer and DuPage County Board member from District 3, agreed.

Bennington is leader for Boy Scout Troop 99 in Woodridge. His students, along with Cub Scouts from Pack 48, will be doing the planting for a day at the fire station.

They will turn the soil and plant the tulip bulbs as well as a row of mums to outline the garden. It is a strong message for the troop, said Bennington.

"It's a Scout regulation that parents cannot smoke around the boys; this re-enforces Boy Scout rules."

Both the Scouts and the students in the Woodridge Community Resource Center's after-school program seem to understand this.

"They feel that smoking stinks; they understand that very well," Johnson said.