



JACKSON COUNTY PILOT

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County is urged to have stricter tobacco fines, rules

Herb 'N Legend has permit, now open in Jackson

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Just as the new Herb 'N Legend store received its tobacco license and opened its doors to customers last week, an urging for stiffer penalties for violating tobacco sales laws, health warnings wherever tobacco is sold and better assurances that Jackson County's tobacco ordinance covers newer products was presented to county commissioners by members of the local Start Noticing youth coalition.

Start Noticing's proposal called the county's 1990 tobacco ordinance inad-

equately as it relates to keeping up with new products aimed at hooking younger customers. And program coordinator Susan Vileta compared the county's fines for violating tobacco sales laws — set at the state minimum of \$75, \$150 and \$200 for each of the first three offenses — to a slap on the wrist.

"Unless cities and counties put more teeth in their ordinances, we're just going to be fighting with the tobacco settlement," said Commissioner Bill Tusa.

Prohibiting tobacco sales and imitation tobacco products through vending machines, at pharmacies or near schools or playgrounds; defining dissolvable tobacco and other new products within the ordinance; restricting unproven electronic cigarettes and

keeping customers from smoking in retail stores are all also proposed.

But not all on the county board initially welcomed the tighter restrictions.

"If mandating everything worked, we wouldn't have drug problems in the county," said Commissioner Loren Tusa. "I have helped you out a lot, but education is far better than some of the things you're proposing. Mandating won't solve all our ills."

Vileta noted, though, that a stronger ordinance would back the message that "the whole community says it's not OK."

"I'm kind of in the same corner (as Loren Tusa)," said board chair Roger Ringkob. "You've got good cooperation from all the merchants. We still have choices. I think we have to

take all this into advisement and work on it."

Board members indicated they would provide feedback on the proposal at some point, though no timeline was set.

Meanwhile, the newest restrictions from the Food and Drug Administration regulating tobacco product sales and marketing tactics took effect June 22. Among the new changes, according to Start Noticing, are:

- A prohibition on the use of descriptions such as "light," "low-tar" and "mild" on advertisements and product packaging.
- Larger, stronger warning labels on smokeless tobacco products and advertisements.
- Elimination of sponsorship of sporting and community events by brand-name tobacco products.

"While this new law is an important victory in the control and regulation of tobacco, there is still more work to do in eliminating youth exposure to tobacco influences such as advertising and product promotion," Vileta said. "Reducing the number of advertisements at the point-of-purchase is necessary if we want to continue to strengthen efforts to protect youth in our community from the influences of tobacco advertising. Point-of-sale advertising is one of the last places tobacco companies can advertise to youth and frequent exposure to these advertisements has been proven to affect youth and low-income, minority and immigrant community tobacco use."



COUNTY BRIEFS

GRANTS, FIBER PROJECT COULD BOOST ARMER

The Allied Radio Matrix for Emergency Response communications system that Jackson County is switching to before 2013 is \$125,911 closer to reality, thanks to the first trickle of grant awards announced since the county decided to move forward with the changeover last October.

Another \$1.3 million in grants has been applied for to help offset the cost of the new radio system, estimated at \$2.6 million or less.

A possible collaboration with the Southwest Min-

nesota Broadband Group's fiber optic installation project could also cut costs by eliminating the need for communicating via microwave.

ARMER towers already erected in Windom and Brewster have shown very positive indications of coverage throughout the county, said Sheriff Roger Hawkinson, and another tower has yet to be put up near Lakefield.

Go online to see a breakdown of the grants received to date.

RURAL WATER EXPANSION TO CROSS COUNTY LINE

Lincoln-Pipestone Rural Water's expansion into Jackson County from the west is anticipated to cross

the county line in the next week or two, according to an update provided last week by company representative Dennis Healey.

Three 6-inch lines will reach Rost Township south of Interstate 90, penetrate two townships from Round Lake and run a shorter line between the other two. Hookups will then begin, starting west of Worthington and continuing east, he said.

In May, Jackson County was at 57 sign-ups toward a goal of 200.

NO PROPERTY TAX INCREASE?

Commissioner Bill Tusa noted last week that the county board's budget committee is attempting to hold the coming year's budget to no increase.