



Latest Start Noticing activities range from Internet to boardroom

by MIKE JORDAN
Staff Writer

Though school is out at Jackson County Central, members of the local Start Noticing group have been as busy as they were during the school year.

Just recently, they launched their own website.

But they have been up to a lot more than just that.

"We presented options for strengthening the Jackson Tobacco Ordinance to the Jackson County Board of Commissioners on June 22," said Susan Vileta, Start Noticing program coordinator. "Several middle school and high school Start Noticing members presented at the meeting. Now the board is reviewing the ideas and plans and will be discussing them again at their July 13 meeting."

Vileta was also very pleased the commissioners were very complimentary and appreciative of Start Noticing's efforts in the community, as well.

"Our students urged our commissioners to make some changes to the tobacco ordinance that will keep the citizens of Jackson County healthy, and protect kids from the powerful influence of tobacco companies," she added. "At this time, we have 2,500 petition signatures — all in favor of removing tobacco ads at the 3-foot level and under. We have 36 organizations in Cottonwood, Jackson and Redwood counties and five state and national organizations that recognize our important work and support it."

This coming Tuesday,

July 13, Start Noticing will host its next coalition breakfast meeting from 7:30 to 8 a.m. in the Jackson County Resource Center's Community Room, with the public invited to attend, Vileta said.

"We are also preparing for the Jackson County Fair, where we will have a booth this year," she said. "In addition to that, we are gearing up our fundraising and planning for Relay for Life on Aug. 7, because Start Noticing has a team this year. And our youth from Windom and Jackson will be joining their partner school Start Noticing groups from Redwood County at Farm Fest in August beyond that."

Start Noticing has also been selected to present at two state conferences in October this year as well — the Minnesota Prevention Resource Center Program Sharing Conference and the Minnesota Department of Health Community Health Conference.

"But first up is our community recognition breakfast," Vileta said. "We like to update community members and gather our coalition together every few months to talk about successes, share ideas on current projects and share with them some opportunities to act."

Two current initiatives Start Noticing will be discussing at the meeting include tobacco prevention ads sponsored by Lorillard Tobacco in Meredith Corp. publications and tobacco industry tobacco prevention materials distributed

If you go . . .

What: Start Noticing coalition breakfast meeting
When: Tuesday, July 13, 7:30 to 8 a.m.
Where: Jackson County Resource Center

to schools.

"We recently discovered several 'prevention' ads sponsored by Lorillard Tobacco in recent issues of 'Parents' and 'Family Circle,'" Vileta said. "Needless to say, we were disappointed that Meredith Corp. would allow these ads in their magazines as tobacco companies certainly are not a legitimate or reliable source for effective tobacco prevention materials. We all know that Lorillard and other tobacco companies are in the business of addiction, not prevention. These programs are about public relations — not public health. We also know no tobacco campaign has produced solid evidence of preventing youth tobacco use."

Start Noticing e-mailed several executives at Meredith Corp. and received an unsatisfactory response from its communications director, she indicated.

"Currently, we are partnering with other tobacco prevention and control programs in Minnesota, New York and Iowa and are sending them another request to reconsider running any advertising from tobacco companies," she said.

And what about the funding schools receive along



Submitted photo

Jackson County Central High School and Middle School students including Kortney Potter (from left), Torrey Yarns, Laura Einertson, Susan Vileta (coordinator), Emily Anderson, Christian Goynes, Aluxis Ingebrightson and Heidi Evers with some of the materials and information they recently presented to the Jackson County commissioners for consideration.

with tobacco prevention materials from big tobacco companies?

"Schools around the country receive funding and tobacco prevention materials from tobacco companies, such as 'Right Decisions Right Now' — created by R.J. Reynolds, the makers of Camels," Vileta said. "Start Noticing is working with schools in our communities to evaluate current policies on accepting funding and materials from tobacco companies and providing resources for leg-

itimate sources of tobacco prevention materials that work. We want to make sure our schools avoid sending the dangerous mixed message to students that it's harmful to use tobacco, but it's OK to take money and materials from the very industry that's trying to addict them."

With school starting early this year in August and fall activities soon to follow, Vileta said fall is always a good time to recruit new members for the group as well as plan events for the

coming school year.

"We'll probably still be working with schools on the comprehensive tobacco policy this fall," she said. "And we've also been invited to school in-service days to educate teachers and school staff about new tobacco industry products and tactics."

With the city of Jackson signed on with Start Noticing's statement of support recently and the group already being well into its fourth year of this grant-supported work, Vi-

leta has found Start Noticing's greatest success to be close at home.

"I'm still impressed by the amount of retailers — 22 in Cottonwood, Jackson and Redwood counties — who have agreed to remove tobacco ads at 3 feet and under," she said. "The scope of our project has changed so much in the last year. Start Noticing youth went to the state capitol in March to show their senators and representatives tobacco marketing strategies and provide examples

of new dissolvable tobacco products. As a result, Sen. Dennis Frederickson talked about Start Noticing on the Senate floor while debating the Tobacco Modernization and Compliance Act that passed. Clear and away, Minnesota has recognized our efforts and is even using one of our images from our project in their new billboard campaign. That is gratifying."