



PRESIDENT & CEO

The smoke is clearing

Ed Lump, FMP
WRA President and CEO

The long and tough battle to make all indoor public places smoke-free is all but over. Close to 40 municipalities have passed smoking bans in one form or another. All the recent ones have been comprehensive bans. These include Fitchburg, Monona, Marshfield and Eau Claire. Our neighboring states, Illinois, Iowa and Minnesota have passed smoke-free laws in just the last year. Public opinion is overwhelmingly in favor of a comprehensive ban to eliminate second hand smoke in every workplace. When the Wisconsin legislature meets again in 2009, a total workplace smoking ban is almost sure to pass.

In the meantime, a surprising trend is developing. Restaurants with alcohol licenses and even some taverns are going totally smoke-free on their own. They aren't waiting for the legislature or their local government to act. They see the handwriting on the wall, and it's not the threat of government action that moves them to ban smoking. It's the knowledge that trying to expand business while allowing smoking flies in the face of a market where nearly 80 percent-plus of the population doesn't smoke.

The portion of consumers who don't smoke, don't like smoke and don't want their children or grandchildren exposed to smoke is growing, while the portion of consumers who smoke is declining. The marketplace is deciding this issue, and the marketplace's decision is not to allow smoking. A situation where non-smokers have the choice of breathing smoke or leaving the building is becoming unacceptable. So is a situation where employees are exposed to second-hand smoke.

Whether forced by the government or making the choice on their own, the vast majority of restaurants have had a positive experience. It appears that even a significant number of smokers support these decisions and continue to patronize their favorite restaurant or tavern. It is also true that some smokers leave for good, but there are plenty

of non-smokers to replace them.

We cannot refute the argument that smokers spend a lot more money at the bar than non-smokers. However, we can't say that it's true either. What we do know is that 80 percent is bigger than 20 percent. Therefore, non-smokers don't have to spend as much because there are more of them.

What is necessary to replace the money from smokers is to have a place where non-smokers want to be, and many times that may be just a smoke-free place.

The opportunity presented by going smoke-free is the opportunity to capture customers who don't smoke. As has been proven time and time again by restaurants that have gone smoke-free voluntarily, non-smokers will respond by patronizing the bar. By going smoke-free on their own, they have gotten a jump on the market.

Also, by acting voluntarily instead of waiting for the passage of a law, the business gets time to adjust and to see what works and what doesn't. They get to try different promotions. They get time to advertise. Positive public relations and media support is usually available to get the word out.

When the law changes the word will get out too, but it will not be about a specific business; it will be about a level playing field.

A major theme of this issue of *Wisconsin Restaurateur* is the "how to" of going smoke-free. You will read about the experiences of peers and how they went about making the change. We hope you will see this as useful benefit of belonging to WRA. [WR](#)

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