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Stamping out smoking: Hilltop Grill and Beverage Co. employees are taking part in a smoking cessation program organized by the New Brunswick Lung Association. From left are: Jim Cooper, general manager; Mista Monteith, server/floor supervisor; Shannon Valanne, server; and Liz Smith, director of public education with the New Brunswick Lung Association.

Hilltop general manager encourages staff to quit

By ADAM BOWIE
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A number of people who work in Fredericton's restaurant and bar industry are hoping to stamp out their smoking habits as part of a campaign co-ordinated by the New Brunswick Lung Association.

The program, which has been gaining momentum in the capital region over the past few months, encourages people who work in the service industry to give up smoking by organizing quit-groups among staff and providing incentives for those who stay away from cigarettes.

The New Brunswick Lung Association has material that local businesses and their employees can use to participate and a Facebook group — Quit Happens — has been created to help service industry employees keep in touch.

Since this is National Non-Smoking Week, Liz Smith, director of public education for the lung association, said this is the perfect time for the employees of local restaurants and pubs to turf their tobacco.

"It's a really busy season for restaurants and bars throughout the fall and leading into the holidays," she said.

"Now that there's a little less stress on everybody and because it's a new year and we try to start fresh in the new year, I'm hoping that people try quitting. They can use this program as a kick-start. Everybody has to make that decision themselves, but when you have encouragement and you have a chance to win prizes and people are helping each other it's easier to have that success."

A group of employees at the Hilltop Grill and Beverage Co. is organizing a pool for the restaurant's staff, hoping that some friendly competition will help them crush their habits for good.

Mista Monteith, who works as a server at the popular local eatery, said she was already planning to quit when she found out about the program.

"So I put a notice up to all the staff and asked if anyone would be interested in trying to quit. We had quite a few responses to it and Jim Cooper, our general manager, has given us an incentive. He said that whoever at the end of six months (is still not smoking) will have a chance at \$100 in our smoking pool," she said.

Monteith said Cooper has also made space

available for servers to take breaks during their shifts, as opposed to stepping outside for a quick puff — a common tradition tied to staff breaks in the hectic restaurant and bar industry.

"(Having a cigarette) takes you away from the scene for a little bit, lets you get outside and get away from the hustle and bustle," she said.

"I know I had stopped previously before for three or four years and I never took a break. So that was a challenge. It's important to take breaks while you're working. Jim said we could use a room in the back as a little staff room. He said we should feel free to go back there and get away for a bit instead of going outside and smoking."

She said a variety of inhalers, nicotine gum and patches are starting to replace the packages of cigarettes that typically made the rounds in the restaurants' staffing area.

"Nobody is ignorant these days. We know that smoking causes many serious health issues. So when it's prevalent in this industry, finding a way to quit is important. It should definitely cut down on absenteeism because of health issues," she said.

"It'll make a healthier work environment for everybody."

Smith said she hopes other establishments will get behind the program, explaining that it's important that management makes it possible for their staff to participate.

"I think that's what is so great about what's happening here at the Hilltop. When the general manager or owner is encouraging his staff, I think it's hugely important," she said.

"The main goal is to live a healthy life. It's about wellness. And that's good for the employees and for the business."

She said the program is open to anyone who works in the service industry in the capital region.

"Even if you don't have a quit pool at work, you can join the Facebook group. That way you're part of a big quit group, full of people in the industry — cooks, servers, bartenders — who are all trying to quit smoking," she said.

More information is available by calling the lung association at 455-8961 or by visiting the Facebook page, which can be found at www.facebook.com/home.php#!/group.php?gid=101365346593384.



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