

<http://www.app.com/article/20111117/NJNEWS/311170098/It-s-fun-stay-Ocean-County-YMCA-unless-you-re-smoker?odyssey=nav%7Chead>

Ocean County YMCA goes tobacco free

Ocean County 'Y' tobacco free

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TOMS RIVER — The Ocean County YMCA is now tobacco free.

To coincide with the 36th annual Great American Smokeout on Thursday, the Whitty Road facility has barred its employees, visitors and almost 10,000 members from ever lighting up on campus grounds again.

“Breathe Easy” signs, heralding the YMCA as being tobacco free, have also been posted at the entrance to the property.

Rodger Koerber, president and chief executive officer of the Ocean County YMCA, said all indoor spaces have been smoke free for at least as long as he has been there, which is about 12 years.

“The inside facilities were smoke-free, but you could smoke on the property,” Koerber said. “We have four ball fields, we obviously have a parking lot, and we just felt it was the time and the opportunity for us to set the example and go completely tobacco free.”

Leslie Terjesen, public information officer for the Ocean County Health Department, said the tobacco-free step for the YMCA is an important one for an institution dedicated to young people.

“When you drive into the Y, you see children ... and when children see adults smoking, it sends the wrong message,” Terjesen said. “We want adults to be role models for our program. Here they are, at a place where they’re getting physical activity, they’re getting healthier.”

Earlier this year, the Ocean County YMCA was selected to participate in a federal grant program called Action Communities for Health, Innovation, and Environmental change – known by the acronym ACHIEVE, according to Lisa Bierly, development director at the local YMCA.

Funded by the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, ACHIEVE partners state and local health departments with organizations such as the YMCA to promote healthier environments in their communities.

Helene Long, a tobacco treatment specialist at the Institute For Prevention with the St. Barnabas Healthcare System, said the Great American Smokeout is an opportunity each year for professionals in her field to educate the public about the harm inflicted by smoking tobacco products.

Three years ago, St. Barnabas used the same occasion to go tobacco free on the grounds of its facilities across New Jersey.

“Smoking is the number one preventable cause of death, hands down, across the board,” said Long, who has offered to work with YMCA members who also want to use the occasion to quit smoking themselves.

“Smoking rates have actually kind of leveled out in the last few years,” Long explained. “There was a tremendous decrease from the Surgeon’s General reporting in 1967 until about 2004. Fifty percent of adults stopped smoking. Then it’s kind of leveled out since 2004. Now we’re at about 22 percent nationally of adults still smoking.”

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