

Closter parks go smoke-free

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CLOSTER

The Borough of Closter has become the 11th Bergen County municipality to institute a 100 percent smoke-free park and recreational area ordinance.

The ordinance, which passed with a 3-2 vote on Oct. 24, makes it "unlawful for any person to smoke within the boundary of the parks, park lands, parkways, park areas or playgrounds."

Saying the residents will benefit from smoke-free parks was Tobacco Control Policy and Legal Resource Center of New Jersey Executive Director Karen Blumenfeld. That includes setting a healthy example for children, said Blumenfeld.

"Saying you can't smoke inside, but can outside is sending mixed messages to our children," she said. "In New Jersey, only 15 percent of the adult population smokes; 85 percent do not smoke."

Additional arguments, said Blumenfeld, include protecting people from secondhand smoke,

enhancing the borough's clean, green, safe and enjoyable outdoor recreational areas and eliminating litter from cigarette butts.

The governing body and residents in attendance were swaying in their decision.

"These parks are hallow grounds. Men from our country died for those grounds, for our freedoms and liberties," said Jim Oettinger, Parks and Recreation director, who added he is not in favor of smoking.

Oettinger continued by referencing the rededication ceremony at Schauble Park, located on Bergenline Avenue in Closter. Schauble Park is dedicated to U.S. Marine Corp. Kenneth William Schauble, who made the ultimate sacrifice during the Vietnam War on June 6, 1968.

"Our brave Closter residents gave so much so that we can all enjoy the freedoms that we hold so dear," said Oettinger.

This smoking ban takes away those freedoms, he said.

Agreeing with Oettinger were Councilman John Glidden and Councilwoman Victoria Amitai, who cast the two descending votes.

"I have a problem with this ordinance," said Glidden. "First, I believe it is an unenforceable ordinance...and I don't think it's been well thought through.

"There are too many laws in this country; there are too many ordinances in this country," he continued.

While Councilwoman Alissa Latner concurred to an extent, her vote was affirmative.

"Yes, it's may not be the most well thought out ordinance, but it's making a statement," said Latner.

The ordinance will take effect immediately.

Clear metal signage has been provided to the borough by the State Department of Health.

Closter has joined the likes of Carlstadt, East Rutherford, Elmwood Park, Franklin Lakes, Lyndhurst, Mahwah, Moonachie, Paramus, Ridgefield and River Vale, all of which have 100 percent smoke-free parks and recreational areas ordinances. Across the Hudson River, as of May 2011, all New York City parks and recreational areas, including the beaches, boardwalks and marinas, are 100 percent smoke-free.