

THE OAKLAND PRESS LOCAL NEWS

Overcast, 51°
5 day forecast

Subscribe

Search

JOB'S
AUTOS
HOMES

Expanded Classified Hours:
CLASSIFIED IS NOW OPEN ON SATURDAY FROM 9AM - NOON
TO BETTER SERVE YOU!

SITE MENU...

Home > Local News > Smoke-free

Monday, May 14, 2007

E-mail Print

Smoke-free

Web-posted May 14, 2007

By NATALIE LOMBARDO
Of The Oakland Press

Although Joe Vicari doesn't smoke, he says giving patrons of his 16 restaurants the option to puff away is vital to business.

As it moves through the Legislature, a controversial proposal could ban public smoking, including in the workplace and restaurants throughout the state.

"It would hurt the business," said Vicari, who owns Andiamo restaurants in Rochester, Royal Oak, Novi and Bloomfield Hills. "For the way the economy is and how bad things are, I don't think Michigan needs anything else to get people upset about."

Senate Bill 109 reflects a snowballing trend throughout the country, with states such as New York, California, Florida and Ohio applying similar bans.

Vicari is one of many local restaurateurs who don't want to experience the possible transition, while health officials are hoping for it.

George Miller, manager of Oakland County Health Division, said Michigan needs to make the change.

"We'll be a healthier community for it," Miller said. "Secondhand smoke can be as bad as firsthand. It's been proven as much of a health risk for ailments as those individuals inhaling the smoke."

Sen. Gilda Jacobs, DHuntington Woods, is one sponsor contending that smoking is a serious public health issue that can easily be addressed.

Advertisement

Other News Links

**OURTOWN
ONLINE**

CLARKSTON

**ATHLETES
OF THE
WEEK**
THE OAKLAND PRESS Dr Pepper
CLICK HERE

**CLICK
TEAM
OUT**

**FEATURED
EMPLOYMENT
Opportunities**
CLICK HERE >

TOP JOBS

View all TopJobs

TOP AUTOS

HARLEY SPORTSER
1994 windshield, saddle bags, big tank, great shape. \$4500 248-624-5973...

View all TopAutos

TOP HOMES

S. LYON 2 bdrm., 2 bath, 1275 sq. ft., appl., FL. room, pool. \$975 248-446-8747...

View all TopHomes

"If we want to have a healthier state, prevent lung cancer and other kinds of diseases that result from inhaling secondhand smoke, we have to make a commitment to make sure people aren't exposed to it," she said.

Like Vicari, critics of the proposed ban said they don't oppose smoke-free environments but think pressuring business owners to outlaw smoking isn't a good idea.

Since 1998, the state has seen a rise in restaurants becoming smoke-free by choice, so owners shouldn't be forced to act, said Andy Deloney, director of public affairs for the Michigan Restaurant Association in Lansing.

"We support the ability and freedom that restaurant and tavern operators and their guests currently have, which is to make decisions for themselves," Deloney said.

For example, Vicari allows smoking in about 20 percent of each of his establishments, which are equipped with smoke filtration systems.

In addition to the Andiamo Italian restaurants, he owns five Country Inn eateries in Macomb County as well as Mesquite Creek in Independence Township.

The bill is pending in the Senate economic development and regulatory reform committee. Other sponsors are Sens. Ray Basham, D-Taylor; Thomas George, R-Kalamazoo; Bruce Patterson, R-Canton; Martha Scott, D-Highland Park; Hansen Clarke, D-Detroit; and Mark Schauer, D-Battle Creek.

Impossible enforcement?

Generally, smoking is banned in many workplaces, hospitals, government buildings, museums, schools and theaters.

Adding restaurants and bars to the mix wouldn't be difficult, Jacobs said. "Other states have done this and the sky hasn't fallen."

But Bill Delaney, owner of Delaney's Lounge, a mid-size bar in Toledo, Ohio, disagrees.

In November 2006, Ohio residents passed a proposal by the Heart, Lung and Cancer Association to ban smoking in most public venues. The switch was made by a popular vote, though it hasn't yet been signed into law.

Delaney said the ban is marginally effective because it's difficult to enforce, so some bar owners are ignoring it.

"We don't show the ashtrays and we put signs up, but if somebody says, 'I want to light up,' I say, 'It's OK,'" he said. "My business relies on smokers - you come in, have a cigarette and a drink."

Delaney has received nearly a dozen warnings from the Ohio Department of Health, but with no looming punishment, the smoking continues.

However, as of May 3, fines are being handed out.

"I'll probably be the first one to get nailed, but we are going to appeal everything," he added.

Still, if the proposal passes in Michigan, officials said enforcement would be possible and manageable, as "no smoking" would be on the books.

According to the bill, a local health department could issue \$100 to \$500 civil fines for violating the ban. Or, a customer or employee could sue a business owner for multiple violations.

Signs indicating that smoking of any kind is prohibited would have to be posted in each place.

Jacobs suspects if the bill doesn't get through the Legislature, it will become a ballot initiative.

Less business

One expert says with Michigan's economy in a shambles, the smoke-free switch would cause dislocation from restaurants and social places such as casinos, bowling alleys and dance clubs for six months to two years - until the public adapts.

"There's no doubt there would be resentment from smokers," said Mike Bernacchi, professor of marketing for the University of Detroit Mercy. "But having to cope with that change, they would soon discover they're not going to stop patronizing restaurants and eventually their behavior would modify from anger to coping skills."

Ohio business owners who tried converting claimed substantial business losses, while nearby bars within Michigan state lines reported significant gains, Delaney said. "Many bars tried going nonsmoking for a while, but they just went back to smoking because they had less patrons."

During that time, Ohioans would drive a few miles further to Michigan beer joints, some that had signs reading, "If you want to smoke, come to Michigan," Delaney said.

"Restaurants are in the business of providing their guests with what they want. Particularly in the very poor economic climate, business owners are doing every single thing they can do right now to get every possible customer to come through those doors," said Deloney of the Michigan Restaurant Association.

At the beginning of 2007, the projection for growth in state restaurant sales was 3.7 percent, ranking Michigan the last of 50 states, he said.

Most states are averaging at least 6 percent growth in sales.

Backers of the smoking ban said sales would increase as a result, but Deloney said that assumption is incorrect.

"Statewide restaurant sales will increase regardless," he said. "It is not as simple as saying pass the smoking ban and sales will go up."

On the other hand, a nonsmoking model could entice young families to move to Michigan, giving the real estate market a shot in the arm, Bernacchi said.

Bo Young, owner of Bo's Brewery & Bistro in downtown Pontiac, said he thinks people would simply step outside for a smoke.

"A smoker will find a location to smoke, whether it's before eating or after to take a break," Young said. "If the law passes, I don't see it as an issue."

Good health

Secondhand smoke can be lethal if a person is exposed to it in proximity for many years, said Dr. James O'Neill, a physician at Clarkston Medical Group for more than 40 years.

"Workers in the entertainment industry like bands, servers and bartenders inhale it and it makes them sick. They don't have a choice," O'Neill said.

More so, secondhand smoke brings on the same illnesses as lighting up and sucking the carcinogens down yourself - such as emphysema, heart disease, high blood pressure and lung cancer.

"People don't realize how vulnerable they are," O'Neill said. "Of course when you're eating is the worst possible time for someone to blow smoke at you. If nothing else, it's rude."

Miller, of the Oakland County Health Division, said the move would be a good preventative

measure to lower health care costs. And it may push people to stop smoking altogether.

"No smoking would become the norm and exception to the rule," he said.

Meanwhile, nonsmoker Matt Hull sipped a soft drink, while watching his buddies light up during a late afternoon visit to Bo's.

"If restaurants were no-smoking, I'd be happier because no one could blow smoke on me," said Hull, 48, of Pontiac.

Across the table, Don Matson said as a smoker, he'd feel like he was being picked on if he were not able to engage in his habit freely.

"Fewer and fewer places are allowing us to smoke. It would be harder for me because I can't relax when I can't smoke," said Matson, 38, of Pontiac.

Their friend Victor Tony "B" agreed.

"We go places for food and equally, a place to smoke," said Victor, 49 of Pontiac. "I'd probably stay at home if we weren't allowed to smoke anymore."

Contact Natalie Lombardo at (248) 745-4639 or natalie.lombardo@oakpress.com.

 [E-mail](#)  [Print](#)

Expanded Classified Hours:

CLASSIFIED IS NOW OPEN ON SATURDAY FROM 9AM - NOON
TO BETTER SERVE YOU!

[Feedback](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Place A Classified Ad](#) | Copyright © 2007 The Oakland Press, All Rights Reserved |