



CHEROKEE NATION

Tobacco Tour Soon to Reach 5,000 School Kids

Although tobacco use among Cherokee Nation high school students seems to be dropping, many young people still take that first puff or dip and become habitual users. Studies show that nearly 90% of smokers begin before the age of 18, and 99% by the age of 26.*

In November 2008, the Cherokee Nation Comprehensive Cancer Control Program started the *Tobacco Tour*, which tells young people about the dangers of tobacco use. At first, it was aimed at fifth- to eighth-grade students, but has grown to include high school students.

The program presentation teaches students how nonceremonial tobacco use can lead to cancer and other health problems, but does not condemn the traditional use of tobacco for sacred American Indian ceremonies. The underlying theme of the program is that the choices students make now can affect their lives in the future. If they choose to use commercial tobacco, drugs, or alcohol, they may not be able to reach their life goals.

Next, eight-time Guinness World Record holder Brian Jackson tells about his life and the bad choices he made as a teen. He illustrates his story by making balloon animals and, at the end of his presentation, demonstrates one of his world records by making a hot water bottle burst using only his lungs.

The last presenter is Ronnie Trentham, a six-time cancer survivor, former smokeless tobacco user, and mayor of Stilwell, Oklahoma. He tells the kids he started chewing tobacco as a teen because all his

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*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Preventing Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults [Fact Sheet]. Available at <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/preventing-youth-tobacco-use/factsheet.html>.



friends did it. He chewed tobacco for only 6 years, but believes it caused cancer in his jaw. He drives the point home with pictures of the surgery to remove his jawbone and the radiation treatments that followed. The pictures grab the kids' attention, but one draws an even bigger reaction. It is called "the Hairy Tongue" and has taste buds that have become precancerous cells, resembling a patch of dead grass.

At the end of the presentation, kids are told to look at their sphere of influence. These three talented and positive men show what people can achieve by making the right personal choices.

The *Tobacco Tour* message has been delivered to more than 4,400 students in 28 elementary schools in the Cherokee Nation's 14-county Tribal Jurisdictional Service Area in northeastern Oklahoma.



The 1½-hour presentation starts with Robert Lewis telling traditional Cherokee stories taught to him by tribal elders. With audience participation, he demonstrates the story he is telling. Each story is significant to Cherokee culture and easily ties into the antitobacco message.