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at CHAPEL HILL

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News Release

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UNC program seeks to cut secondhand smoke, offers stickers to get the message to restaurants

CHAPEL HILL -- If you're one of many people who made a New Year's resolution to quit smoking, you can increase your chances of success by avoiding smoky places, according to Melanie Miller, associate program coordinator of the Environmental Tobacco Smoke Training, Education, and Research (EnTER) Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

"In North Carolina, businesses, health departments, hospitals and school systems are instituting smoke-free policies to protect the health of their employees, students and patients, and an increasing number of restaurants are going smoke-free," Miller said.

To encourage restaurants to disallow smoking, stickers to leave on the bill are available from the North Carolina Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch, she said. The stickers include one of three different messages:

- Happiness is Smoke-Free Dining: We Will Tell Our Friends.
- I have a health concern. I like your restaurant but not the smoke. I'll come back when it's smoke-free.
- I'm disappointed. I like your restaurant. I'd come more often if it were smoke-free.

"Being in smoke-free environments makes it easier for smokers to quit and protects nonsmokers from the damaging effects of secondhand smoke," Miller said. "Even short periods of exposure to secondhand smoke can increase the heart rate and blood pressure, stiffen blood vessels and decrease the body's ability to deliver and utilize oxygen."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that anyone who has risk factors for heart disease should avoid being exposed to secondhand smoke in enclosed places, even for short periods, she said. Children who are exposed to secondhand smoke miss more days of school and have more respiratory infections and asthma attacks.

"In North Carolina, health care costs for 1.5 million smokers total \$2 billion a year, Miller said. "Tobacco use causes cancer, lung disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and heart disease. Smoking is responsible for one in three cancer deaths and one in five deaths from all causes."

To request stickers or for more information, contact Miller at 919-966-5083 or mmiller@med.unc.edu.

The EnTER Program helps local and statewide communities advocate for smoke-free policies to boost state residents' health, she said. Housed in the family medicine department at the UNC School of Medicine, EnTER staff members lead training and provide up-to-date information on the health effects of secondhand smoke and how people can work for better smoke-related policies.

- 30 -

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