

Tobacco group ousts activist from meeting

By JIM BARNETT

Staff writer

RALEIGH — Saying its annual conference in Raleigh is a private affair, the Tobacco Merchants Association on Tuesday banned Alan Blum, a leading anti-smoking activist who had registered and paid to attend.

Blum, a Houston doctor who founded the anti-smoking group Doctors Ought to Care, said he was dismissed by Farrell Delman, president of the association. Delman offered to reimburse \$1,600 of expenses, Blum said.

The activist said he wanted to gather information on the tobacco industry, not make an anti-smoking statement at the meeting. He said he had planned to publish his findings in Tobacco Control, a British publication.



Blum

John Rupp, a Washington lawyer who represents the Tobacco Merchants Association, said the industry group was within its rights to oust Blum.

"Basically, it was made clear that it was a closed meeting, and it was only for people associated with the tobacco industry," Rupp said by telephone. "I really think it would be unfair (to make it appear) that the industry was being paranoid on this occasion."

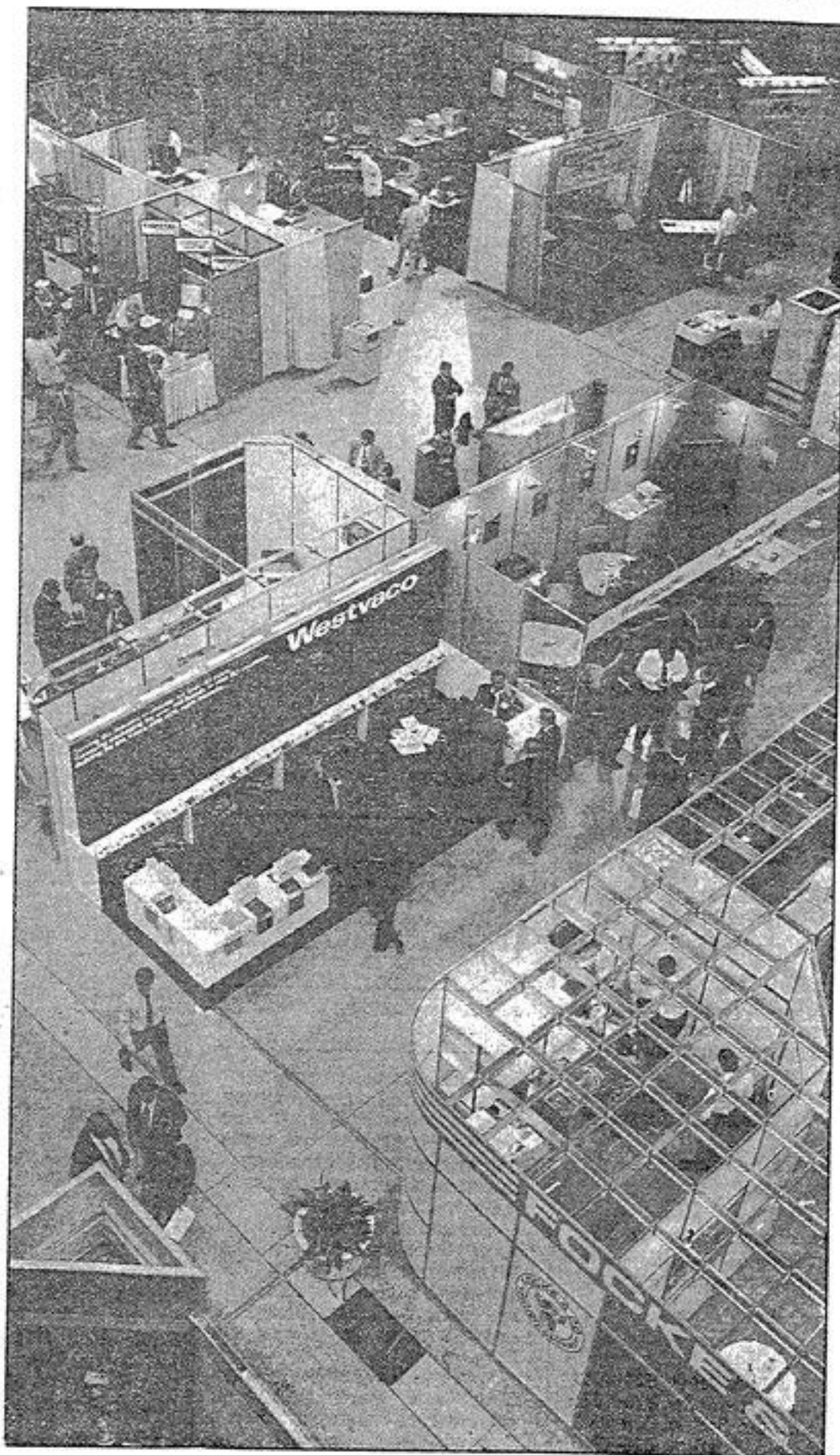
But Blum said he was invited by Tobacco International, an industry publication that is holding its annual conference in conjunction with the Tobacco Merchants Association. A letter of invitation to him was dated May 5.

Blum is listed among registered attendees, but his name is misspelled as "Bloom." Rupp said that if Blum's name had been spelled correctly, an association staff member likely would have recognized it and told the activist not to come.

The misspelling was a clerical error made by the association, Blum said. The association did not repeat the error on his conference name tag. The letter of invitation from Tobacco International also spelled his name correctly.

Blum said he would like to be readmitted to the conference. But if he's not, he'll probably visit friends in the area and perhaps tour a cigarette factory.

"I'm here on my vacation," he said in an interview. "It's some way to spend a vacation."



Staff photo by Roger Winstead

Exhibiting tobacco

More than 100 exhibitors worldwide have set up booths at the Tobacco International Inc. exhibit at the Raleigh Civic and Convention Center. The exhibitors include companies from 34 foreign countries that paid \$2,500 for a 100-square-foot space. The three-day conference and exhibit is

held every three years by Tobacco International, a New York trade magazine. Exhibitors range from manufacturers of cigarette machines to foreign tobacco wholesalers. Exhibits are free to industry representatives and \$10 for visitors. The conference ends Thursday.