



**Thom  
Marshall**

## Gone in a puff of smoke . . . ?

**A** COUPLE of days ago, at the same time the story was breaking about the two biggest tobacco companies seeking to settle the lawsuits against them, I was studying a tobacco exhibit at the Jesse H. Jones Library.

The library serves the Texas Medical Center. It is surrounded by hospital buildings where medicine is practiced, buildings where medicine is taught, buildings where medical research is going on, and a few parking garages, too. Too few, if you ask me. I had to go clear to the top floor of one for a spot that cost \$5 for only a couple of hours.

Here I am griping about a measly five bucks. I should be embarrassed. When tobacco is involved, \$5 is nothing. A lot of smokers burn more than that in one day.

Which is why tobacco companies are so rich. A story I saw said RJR Nabisco and Philip Morris may be willing to pay as much as \$300 billion to buy their way out of lawsuits over smoking-related health problems.

"The most addictive thing about tobacco is money."

Alan Blum said that while we were looking at the exhibit. He is the doctor and anti-tobacco activist who founded DOC, which stands for Doctors Ought to Care. The exhibit was put together by Alan and DOC.

### Telling the big story

It is small. Only a couple of display cases. But it tells a big story about the history of tobacco.

First item in the first display case is a book published in 1859 *The Lancet*. In this old volume is a discussion of adverse health effects of smoking and also its economic and social toll.

One old magazine ad on display says, "Camel invites you to enjoy the interesting features of the Camel cigarette exhibit at the A.M.A. Convention ..."

hibit at the A.M.A. Convention ..."

By the 1930s, cigarette advertisements were appearing in medical journals. In 1938, a big advertising campaign based on a survey of 113,597 physicians claimed "more doctors smoke Camels" than any other cigarette.

In 1964, there were 12 resolutions submitted by delegates at the AMA annual meeting, urging support of the conclusions of the U.S. Surgeon General's report released earlier that year, regarding the health hazards of smoking.

"Instead," an exhibit caption says, "the AMA issued a pamphlet entitled 'Smoking Facts You Should Know' that stressed the dangers of burns and suffocation from falling asleep while smoking and warned about the costly damage cigarettes could do to sofas, rugs and clothing."

A newspaper story from 1978 in the display has this headline: "Tobacco Can Cause Cancer in Animals, Liggett Admits."

Dated Washington, the story begins: "Liggett and Myers Co. apparently has become the first cigaret maker to acknowledge that tobacco causes cancer in laboratory animals."

Almost 20 years ago, and yet it has some striking similarities to a big story in the news just days ago.

## Fast-forward a few frames

I have to skip a lot because of space limitations, but the final item on display is from current times, a copy of the March 24, 1997, issue of Physician's Weekly. It reports "... the AMA hasn't excised tobacco shares from its own employees' 401(k) plan, which is run by senior AMA execs ..."

Items in the exhibit came from a huge collection amassed through many years by Alan and DOC. The organization recently kicked off a drive to raise funds for a museum to make the collection available to the public.

At DOC offices where a portion of it is stored, Alan opened a few boxes at random, describing or commenting upon the contents.

The collection shows how tobacco has been weaved into the fabric of our society.

Tobacco companies sponsor a wide variety of sporting and cultural events. Tobacco money is donated to charitable causes. Doctors get grants of tobacco money for certain research projects ...

Based upon what he has collected and what he has studied about the tobacco industry over the years, Alan predicts the current court cases and investigations and any settlements that might result won't really change much in the long run.

He predicts the tobacco industry is going to be around for a long time to come. And it will continue to find creative ways of promoting and advertising its products to hook new customers.

And it will continue making a whole lot of money.

Thom Marshall's e-mail address is [thom.marshall@chron.com](mailto:thom.marshall@chron.com)