NEW PRODUCT

New containers hold your lunch, keep in cold

The Fit and Fresh System includes eight items designed to help people prepare, store, and carry more healthful and flavorful foods on the go. The system includes a "smart portion chop center," which is a platform to chop, measure, and weigh food. The prep-and-pack tray holds seven smart portion containers that can be dated and stored for a week's worth of meals. Almost all parts of the system are freezer-, microwave- and dishwasher-safe. Products are sold individually, and prices vary by item. The prep center is $24.99 and the prep-and-pack tray is $14.99. The products are available on the company's Web site, www.fit-fresh.com and at Living-in-Things, Target and Renart.

LOU GEHRIG'S DISEASE

Clinical trial to study lithium's effect on disease

The ALS Association is funding a clinical trial to determine whether lithium can slow disease progression in patients with early stages of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, which is commonly referred to as Lou Gehrig's disease. Lithium is a naturally occurring element commonly used to treat bipolar disorder. Animal studies have shown that lithium protects cells in the brain and spinal cord. ALS is a fatal, degenerative disease of the nervous system that often progresses rapidly.

MENTAL HEALTH

UAB plans series of forums on mental health

The University of Alabama at Birmingham will host one of 48 free public forums nationwide called "Healthy Minds Across Alabama" on Sept. 14 from 1 to 4 p.m. at the Margaret Campbell, M.D. Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia Center, 1201 Fourth Ave. South, Suite 1210. The forum will highlight research, psychology and other mental health issues. Parking is available at the Fourth Avenue deck, 1300 Fourth Ave. South; limited free parking is available on the street next to the auditorium.

COMING UP

Suicide Prevention — The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention will hold an "Out of the Darkness" community walk on Sept. 15 at 9 a.m. in Birmingham Park. Check-in begins at 7:30 a.m. Call 323-4433 for more information or visit www.outofthedarkness.org. Proceeds go to suicide prevention programs and outreach to survivors in Alabama.

He holds the smoking gun

Physician directs 'scholarly activism' on the ill effects of tobacco

Dr. Alan Blum is surrounded by documents and artifacts that tell the often bizarre story of tobacco's role in society and its relationship with human health and the health care industry. The items in the huge collection at the University of Alabama's Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society range from the amusing and quaint to the deadly serious.
TOBACCO: Center is resource for the WHO

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Attorney meetings. He’s tapped thousands of photos of billboards, cigarette mascots and a host of events sponsored by tobacco money. People have also donated thousands of items.

“We went to 42 cigarette-sponsored events in Houston in one year alone,” Blum said.

The collection is contained in 2,500 boxes, most of which are in public storage. A small portion of the collection is housed in the basement of Nott Hall. It’s not open to the public, but provides assistance to researchers, health officials and others. The collection is considered a resource for the World Health Organization, Blum said.

Books and more

The archive includes the largest collection of books on tobacco — more than 4,000 volumes — at any university, Blum said. The center also has popular magazines, newspapers, old medical journals and historical books going back to 1844.

There are also more than 1,000 video tapes and numerous photographic slides. An old machine was used to disperse candy cigarettes to children. “We have a whole section of children’s tobacco products,” Blum said.

As he amassed his collection, Blum emerged as a nemesis of the tobacco industry. He has testified before Congress, made numerous speeches and debated with tobacco industry officials.

“It hasn’t been easy,” said Blum, 60. “It’s what I call scholarly activism.”

Taken as a whole, the collection is not only critical of tobacco, but it also raises questions about the role of medical research in the industry.

The collection includes original copies of the famous 1964 report on tobacco and health, which, in general, the late Dr. Luther Terry, who was from Alabama. “It’s a living document,” Blum said, noting that the research on smoking and health is still used as a source for scholarly work. “This went to every doctor. This is the teaching point.”

The report was the product of a year of secret meetings by a panel that had been approved by the tobacco industry. Then, tobacco companies disagreed with the panel's findings and insisted that much more research was needed before banning an $8 billion-a-year industry so that many people relied upon for their livelihoods.

The other major entity to dispute the report was the American Medical Association, which had just accepted $15 million from the tobacco industry to conduct research, Blum said. It’s all in smoking chemicals, he said, producing documents to support the story.

“We lost 14 years’

It was ridiculous, Blum said. There was sufficient medical evidence by 1953 that smoking was a serious health hazard to make the link between smoking and lung cancer. But anybody who tried to do it was ridiculed and criticized as being defeatist or fanatic. One of the most eminent physicians to come out of that type of work was Dr. Alton Ochsen, a famous thoracic surgeon who dedicated his life and smoking because he had to operate on people with lung cancer.

After the surgeon general’s report, it took 14 years for the AMA to back out with the report concluding that smoking causes lung cancer.

“We lost 14 years,” Blum said. “They kept this game going.”

Blum said funding from the tobacco industry has been an ethical problem for many medical researchers. “They’re doing it today.”

Last year, Philip Morris USA gave the University of Virginia a $25 million gift to fund research. The School of Medicine and the McIntire School of Commerce said they would use the money to study ways to prevent smoking by children and to reduce the harm of smoking. They are also planning to study nicotine addiction.

Blum is unperturbed. “Now they’re doing work on making smoking safer,” he said.

That’s been changed before, Blum said, and it ended up giving people a false sense of safety. “That’s what the cigarette filters were all about.”

The filter is the biggest fraud ever in the history of...

Blum also has suspicious efforts to bring the cigarette industry under control of the Food and Drug Administration. He has testified before Congress against the legislation, which was written with the assistance of Philip Morris. It’s just another race, he said, but this time the tobacco industry is co-opting one of the primary government agencies responsible for the nation’s health.

“It’s the biggest single scandal I’ve seen in this field, and I’ve been doing this for 30 years,” Blum said.

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G O O D  N E I G H B O R S

Good Neighbors is a reader exchange column. Please include your name, address and role.

To G.S., It is a Pelican boat (10 feet 3 inches) with a 50-pound thrust Minn Kota motor. It is rack that I will give to N.E.B. if he/she will pick it up. It has 1 floor and 12 free angel wood logs.