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MAKING FUNNY

for a cause

'Cartoonists Take Up Smoking' exhibit takes aim at tobacco industry

By Doug Margeson
Journal Reporter

The cartoons in Artworks Gallery's new exhibit "Cartoonists Take Up Smoking" do not make their points through subtlety.

Ben Sargent of the Austin American-Statesman shows the marketing department at a tobacco company reviewing sketches of its latest product for the youth market: A cigarette shaped like a baby's binky. Another, by Draper Hill of the Detroit News shows the Statue of Liberty as a skeleton with a cigarette in her mouth. Her torch is an open cigarette pack. Yet another, by Rob Rogers of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, shows a man representing the state legislature in bed with Joe Camel, having a cigarette.

Good grief, is there any attempt at all to be fair here? "What would be fair to them?" said curator Don Hudgins. "Tobacco companies kill people."

Close to home

He knows. Both his parents died from smoking-related illness and his brother, an otherwise splendidly healthy appearing figure of a man, dropped dead from a heart attack at age 50. He smoked, too. Even Hudgins smoked for 20 years. For the last 10 of them, he struggled to quit and finally did. He still gets the urge for a cigarette now and then.

"None of us are saints," Hudgins noted wryly. And that's just the way



Rick Schweinhart/Journal

Don Hudgins, associate director of Art Patch, hangs a cartoon that is part of the art exhibit, 'Cartoonists Take Up Smoking.' The show consists of editorial cartoonists skewering the tobacco industry.

the tobacco lobby likes it, according to the folks at Art Patch, which organized the exhibit. Art Patch was founded last year by the Cornish College of Design and the Seattle King County Department of Health. The group has two goals: Creating a sustainable source of money for arts in the Puget Sound area and using the arts to address

social issues.

Taking up social issues

The smoking cartoon exhibit is its first social issues exercise. The cartoons themselves come from the collection of Dr. Alan Blum of the University of Alabama Medical School's Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society. The center has one of the

'CARTOONISTS TAKE UP SMOKING'

- 7-10 p.m. Thursday to April 3
- Artworks Gallery, 1914 4th Ave., Seattle
- www.artpatch.org

world's largest archives of documents on smoking issues, including more than 300 original cartoons.

Some 200 of them are on exhibit at Artworks, along with newspaper stories and other documents.

They present a decidedly one-sided view of the controversy. Hudgins thinks that's equitable. The tobacco industry has spent many years and huge amounts of money selling cigarettes to women, children, minorities and other target groups and, as part of their campaigns, have used the arts to do it, Hudgins said. Tobacco-sponsored art exhibits, concerts and other functions are designed to make smoking look hip and cool. And they work, Hudgins said.

Of course, such things are perfectly legal — "Anyone who sells a product has a right to advertise it, even if it does kill 400,000 people a year," Hudgins noted — and arts groups, always short of funds, are eager to get the money. Art Patch wants to even the score a little.

The danger of any artistic attempt at social relevancy is that it will end up pedantic and preachy, Hudgins noted. Well, the cartoons in the exhibit are pedantic and preachy — but they are very funny about it.

"Pretty much everyone takes a hit; the tobacco industry, politicians, even the arts," Hudgins said. "Fair? it makes no attempt to be fair. Why should it?"

Giddyup! Segway polo is beginning to take off