

# COMMENTARY

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## With open arms

### *UA welcomes cigarette makers to campus*

By ALAN BLUM

**M**ore than 40 years after U.S. Surgeon General Luther Terry, an Alabamian, published the landmark report "Smoking and Health," the toll taken by tobacco is greater than ever.

The 1964 indictment of cigarettes as a principal cause of lung cancer and other diseases should have marked the beginning of the end of the Marlboro Man. But far from heading off into the sunset, the tobacco industry has more than met the challenge of keeping America smoking. The sad result is that cigarette smoking remains the nation's No. 1 avoidable health problem, accounting for 440,000 deaths a year.

In Alabama alone, annual deaths from cigarette-related diseases such as emphysema, heart attack, stroke and lung cancer total 7,600, more than all the deaths from AIDS, illegal drugs, alcohol, motor vehicle accidents, homicides and suicides combined. Among all states, Alabama trails only Kentucky and Mississippi in the percentage of men who smoke (29 percent). In the 18-24 age group, more young women are lighting up than men. Overall, 25 percent of the state's 4.5 million population smokes, compared with the national average of 20 percent.

And we're paying a price: Alabama's Medicaid expenditures for smoking-related illness cost taxpayers well more than \$200 million last year; annual lost productivity due to smoking now approaches \$2 billion.

On the other side of the ledger, last year Altria, parent corporation of Philip Morris USA, the maker of Marlboro, earned more than \$5 billion in profit, putting it near the top of the Dow Jones average. Forty percent of all cigarettes sold are Marlboro, more than the next seven brands combined.

So who is still coughing up more than \$4.50 a pack in Alabama, or more than \$1,600 a year for a 20-cigarettes-a-day addiction? Those with the least education and lowest incomes are most likely to light up: 40 percent of individuals who lack a high school diploma smoke, compared to just more than 10 percent of those with a college degree. Minority groups are especially hard hit:

► See **Cigarette**, Page 8B

NEWS ILLUSTRATION/  
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## CIGARETTE: Makers recruit UA students

► From Page 1B

A front-page story in The News on Jan. 26 reported that African-Americans are far more likely than other racial groups to develop lung cancer even if they smoke the same amount.

Why, then, did the University of Alabama roll out the red carpet last month for the Marlboro man, in the rotunda of the journalism school? Amid the College of Communication and Information Sciences Hall of Fame, which honors great men and women of Alabama such as the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Helen Keller, 10 job recruiters from Philip Morris USA hosted a catered reception for some two dozen students to tout the benefits of working for America's No. 1 cigarette manufacturer.

If hired as summer interns or full-time territory sales managers, these future University of Alabama graduates, who themselves are highly unlikely to smoke, will be working to reinforce the nicotine addiction of countless young, poor and less-educated Alabamians.

The lead recruiter of the group, UA alumna Tiffany Elliott, spoke eloquently about Philip Morris' core values, integrity and social responsibility. Nor did she deny that cigarettes cause lung cancer and a host of other diseases. "We're very honest about what we do," she told me. "We know the product we have causes harm. We haven't always been honest about that. Our culture has definitely changed." And she was most adamant that "we don't want to pull in children."

The Philip Morris recruitment brochure distributed at the school highlights its Youth Smoking Prevention campaign, which portrays cigarettes as strictly an adult custom that parents should discuss with their children. But every parent already knows that teenagers seek rebellious and risk-taking ways to reject authority, so such a campaign may make smoking even more appealing to young people.

Nonetheless, at least one UA student at the reception supports the company's approach. "Yeah, Philip Morris sells cigarettes," he said, "but they also help prevent children from smoking."

As various legal restrictions have been placed on cigarette advertising and sponsorships, tobacco companies have shifted their marketing budgets to the retail point of purchase, as well as to promotions in bars and clubs where they enroll young adults for direct-mail discount offers and other gifts. The ubiquitous bar promotions are not mentioned in the Philip Morris recruitment brochure.

To reach its youthful consumers, then, Philip Morris USA has stepped up its recruitment on college campuses, cultivating ties with 35 universities across the country. The University of Alabama has the dubious distinction of being the sole institution of higher learning in our state which has put out the welcome mat for a tobacco company to recruit its students.

In addition to receptions and presentations in the College of Communications, Philip Morris USA has gained access to classes at the Culverhouse College of Commerce and Business Administration and has addressed student



groups. At last month's Career Day, the company was one of just two out of more than 100 to have its logo prominently printed in the job fair's program and to be given special thanks by the university.

### Barred from Career Day

Perhaps this special relationship can explain why I was barred by a UA administrator from observing this year's Career Day, at which both Philip Morris USA and the RJ Reynolds Tobacco Co. were given prominent space to meet and greet hundreds of Alabama students.

Over the past 30 years, during the course of my research on the tobacco industry, I have attended and studied hundreds of events in all 50 states that have been sponsored in whole or in part by cigarette companies. The stepped-up involvement of Philip Morris on the University of Alabama campus confirms findings of my published research, namely that cigarette manufacturers have succeeded in forging close ties to academia as a means of assuring the future strength of cigarette sales in the face of medical admonitions against smoking.

Although the UA administration has thus far declined to reveal the full nature and extent of its dealings with the maker of Marlboro, the effort to prevent one of its own professors from gathering information on the way the tobacco industry attracts students is a clear violation of academic freedom. If university administrators intend to lend their support to Gov. Bob Riley's initiatives aimed at reducing the high cost of health care and preventing disease, then playing up to cigarette company recruiters is antithetical to this mission.

At the University of Alabama, the medical school is entrusted with protecting public health, while the business and communications colleges appear to be protecting the health of cigarette companies. Perhaps I am too naive. But 40 years after the surgeon general's report, it's not hard to see why we have failed to end the smoking pandemic.

Philip Morris USA recruiters will return to the University of Alabama Ferguson Student Center on Tuesday.