

“ voices ”



**KICKING**

**THE HABIT**

story by Erin Munley / design by Jessica Lin

# “I loved smoking

“I loved smoking,” admits Becky Murray, Manager of Contract Compliance and Worksite Wellness co-chair for the State Health Plan, “Cigarettes were my best friend. And I wouldn’t say I’ve lost my best friend...I’ve just moved on.” Murray, who had been a smoker for slightly more than two decades, has now been smoke-free for nearly six months.

Just three weeks after she quit smoking, Murray said that she was surprised that she did not crave a cigarette when she saw others smoking. “I thought I would never be able to go in public again,” said Murray laughing, “I didn’t think I could do it.”

Since she quit, she has tested her resolve

and now even finds cigarette smoke slightly offensive. “To test myself, I deliberately made myself pick up a pack and smell them,” Murray said, “It’s a horrendous smell!”

Murray’s 18-year-old daughter had been encouraging her mom to quit her “stinky” and expensive habit for a long time. Becky Murray was also motivated by the death of her mother at a young age from lung disease attributed to smoking. “I want to be able to play with my grandkids,” said Murray.

With these things in mind, a determined Murray set a target quit date. December 15, 2006, marked the end of her twentieth year of smoking and was also her daughter’s birthday. ▶



Becky Murray (center) walking and sharing her success story with coworker Kathryn Lewis (right) and intern Jessica Lin (left).

“I didn’t want to go into my 21st year of smoking,” said Murray. “But I didn’t make that date. I didn’t even come close.”

One Sunday evening in February 2007, however, Murray met her goal. She took a Chantix pill, a prescription medication designed to help adults quit smoking, before she went to bed and the next morning began her life as a nonsmoker.

“The only effort I made that morning was not to go downstairs to smoke,” said Murray.

Throughout the rest of the day, she constantly distracted herself from smoking. “I chewed gum on the way to work. I became immersed in

work and I went for a walk.” Before Murray quit smoking, the State Health Plan had started a walking program as a worksite wellness initiative.



Now, many employees take health walks for 15 to 30 minutes during lunch time or afternoon break. When Murray first quit, she was always

recruiting walking partners. She believes that people walk to benefit their own health and also because they want to support her in her decision to quit smoking.

As co-chair of the Health and Wellness Committee, and as a nurse, Murray knows the health benefits of smoking cessation, as well as the benefits to an organization. “I read the material and saw the importance of a smoking cessation program and what it means to the organization for the program to be successful,” said Murray. “I wanted to be successful.”

One of her biggest helps in quitting, Murray said, was reading about the immediate

health benefits of smoking cessation, which can take place just five minutes after a person quits, in a Worksite Wellness Toolkit brochure one of her coworkers gave to her. “I kept one in my desk, and one at home,” said Murray who read them for support.

She also emphasized that she would not have been successful without her “lifelines” – three of her coworkers who quit smoking successfully. Murray said that these inspirational people telling her that they felt the same way have been her biggest source of encouragement and support.

“Get a buddy,” Murray advises others who want to quit smoking and remain smoke-free, “If you continue to talk about it, it helps so much. You learn so much from people who quit successfully.”

Although she has been successful thus far, Murray said that becoming a nonsmoker has also been an adjustment and even tough at times. She said the drive home was initially her biggest struggle. “There was a certain location that I would light up,” said Murray.

Now, at six months as a nonsmoker, she says that weight gain is her biggest challenge. “I would encourage people, especially women, to expect to gain a little weight. But, healthwise, an extra ten pounds is much better for you than a pack of cigarettes,” Murray said positively.

Her advice to someone who is trying to quit smoking: “Like yourself enough to live. You may not physically feel well. You may not emotionally feel well. Emotions fluctuate. Convince yourself by repeating ‘I am a nonsmoker’” – until you become one.

Murray, a six-month nonsmoker who describes her life as positive, energetic and hopeful without cigarettes, still has to remind herself that she is a nonsmoker. Her next goal is to lose the weight she has gained. In the meantime, she said “I also plan to reward myself.” And she certainly deserves it. ■



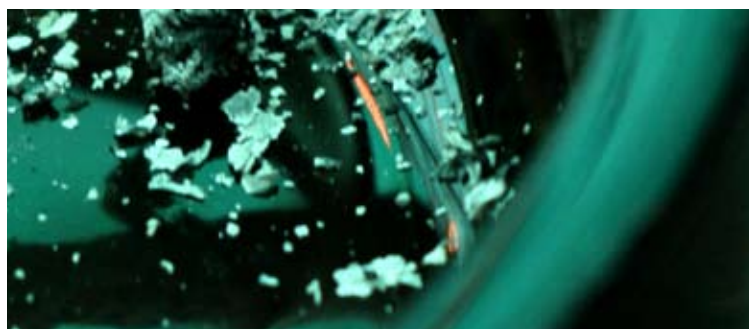
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