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Weston tavern owner joins smoke-free push

By Amy Olson

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WESTON -- A Weston bar owner is joining a group of Wisconsin taverns that is working with clean indoor air advocates to call for a statewide smoking ban.

About 100 Wisconsin tavern and bar owners launched Taverns Clearing the Air this week. Among the members is Mark Kluck, owner of Kluck's Callon Saloon in the village of Weston.

The 53-year-old tavern owner had a heart attack 10 years ago, possibly because of exposure to secondhand smoke. He also has ongoing lung problems.

After his heart attack, doctors examined Kluck and told him he would have to quit smoking if he wanted to regain his health.

When he told them he never had smoked, but had spent his adult life working in smoky bars, the doctors advised him to get out of the tavern business.

So far, he has held onto his bar -- and until recently, he still allowed patrons to smoke.

Kluck and other bar owners are taking on a powerful interest -- The Tavern League of Wisconsin, which remains opposed to any statewide smoking ban.

"I'm thrilled Mark has been willing and able to speak out," said Renee Trowbridge, a public health educator at the Marathon County Health Department.

"I think Mark represents the views of a lot of bar owners" who might be reluctant to voice their opinions, Trowbridge added.

Kluck said he's not alone in his opinion and said he knows of other bar owners in central Wisconsin who are in favor of the ban but who are reluctant to publicly support it.

"A lot of them are sticking to their guns. I think they should let it go," Kluck said. "I've seen so many people die through the years because of smoking."

"I'd like to see it made statewide" to even out the playing field between bars in communities with smoking bans versus bars in places without bans, Kluck said.

Kluck has experimented with going smoke-free for a day a couple of times, and he said patrons have approved. But until the ban the village of Weston passed Dec. 15 goes into effect in 2010, it could be tough to make the experiment permanent, he said.

Additional Facts

New bill to be introduced

A new bill that would require all workplaces to go smoke-free is being circulated among state senators and Assembly members for support. State Sen. Fred Risser, D-Madison, said the bill contains the

exact same language as the smoking provision in Gov. Jim Doyle's budget proposal and would take effect within 60 days of passing.

The stand-alone bill could be passed before the budget bill, on which legislators might not reach agreement before June, Risser said.

The separate smoke-free workplace bill also is being sponsored by state Sen. Mike Ellis, R-Neenah, and state Reps. Jon Richards, D-Milwaukee, and Al Ott, R-Forest Junction.
