

By Kelsey Dayton

Kasey Mateosky started smoking 28 years ago when he joined the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks.

He didn't smoke in his truck. He didn't smoke at home. But every Tuesday night, he lit up at the bowling alley in the club.

"I was like a Pavlovian dog," he said.

Starting Oct. 1, Mateosky's few-cigarettes-a-week habit might be snubbed out for good.

The club is going smoke free, leaving the Log Cabin Saloon and The Virginian as the only bars that allow smoking in Teton County.

About three months ago, Fernando Escovedo, leading knight in the organization, made a motion to ban smoking in the club. Elks Clubs around the country have been working to make themselves more family friendly, Escovedo said, and with the smoke and smell cigarettes left behind, people weren't joining. Escovedo talked with members, and while there was some grumbling, most - even those who smoked - favored a ban, he said.

Mateosky, chairman of the membership committee, said there had been a lot of discussion in the last six months about a club smoking ban. After Escovedo made the motion, members discussed it for about three months, he said. A lot of members go to the bar to smoke. But even more people don't go because of the smoke, he said.

The lodge has about 500 members, with about 350 active, Mateosky said. About 60 members attended the voting meeting Sept. 10. While Mateosky didn't know the exact numbers, he said the ban passed by about 80 percent.

"It was not contentious," he said.

Many of the members who smoke, including Mateosky, voted to make the club smoke free because it will help aid membership, Mateosky said. One of the biggest obstacles in recruiting new members has been the smoke.

Since the club made its decision, Mateosky has already had seven people interested in joining who weren't before because of the smoking, he said.

"It's sort of the new guard," Mateosky said. "It's the new way of thinking."

The club also hosts many community functions, such as kids' birthday parties. Mateosky said he thinks there will be more requests for those events once the club doesn't smell like smoke.

The club also has renovations planned in the bar and the kitchen.

"Why would we spend all the money there and do renovations ... and it go back and smell like an ashtray?" Mateosky said.

Jeremy Besbris, a member of the coalition working toward getting a smoking-ban ordinance passed in Jackson, said he was happy to hear the Elks Club had decided on its own to go smoke free.

"It's one more step to making Jackson totally smoke free," he said.

But a law banning smoking in public places is still needed, Besbris said, because bars and restaurants might reinstate smoking, especially if they change ownership.

Besbris said he wasn't surprised at businesses choosing to go smoke free but was surprised at the resistance toward making a law.

The Jackson Town Council voted not to consider a smoking ban at a May meeting.

The Virginian and the Log Cabin Saloon, which has one floor that is non-smoking and one that is smoking, said they plan to continue to allow smoking in the bars.

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