



Press Release
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Montana Celebrates the 5th Anniversary of the Montana Tobacco Quit Line and All Who Live Tobacco-Free

HELENA - This May marks the 5th Anniversary of the Montana Tobacco Quit Line in providing support for those people who want to live free from tobacco addiction.

The Montana Tobacco Quit Line, funded by the Montana Tobacco Use Prevention Program (MTUPP), provides free help to tobacco users who want to quit. Participants in the Montana Tobacco Quit Line program are **seven to ten times more likely to successfully quit** than those who try to quit alone, without professional assistance. **With one of the highest success rates nationwide (30 percent), the Montana Tobacco Quit Line has helped nearly 10,000 Montanans quit smoking and using spit tobacco.**

One local man who is excited about sharing his success story is Helena businessman, Mark Viergutz. Viergutz started smoking at age 16 when he got his drivers license -- tobacco use was just another way to “be cool” and express his burgeoning independence. As an adult, smoking became the way he would deal with anxiety and stress. By the time he reached his early thirties, Viergutz was hooked, regularly smoking a pack a day sometimes more on the weekends.

Realizing that cigarettes were negatively affecting his health Viergutz tried to quit his habit on his own several times, but to no avail. He had some success with a program offered in Los Angeles by a local church but found after a few months, he was back using cigarettes.

At the age of 52, Viergutz finally decided it was time to quit for good. “I was referred by someone I trusted to the St. Peter’s Hospital Quit for Life Program which uses group support along with calls to the FREE Montana Quit Line Program,” recalled Viergutz.

Viergutz attended classes at St. Pete’s hospital and took advantage of the smoking cessation aids offered by the Montana Tobacco Quit Line. After completing an intake phone call and a coaching session, Viergutz was mailed the nicotine patch, which he used for two months. Viergutz also used the Quit Line phone service on several occasions.

One in particular instance was when he was driving in his truck to Bozeman and had an intense craving. “Driving was always a strong trigger for me,” explained Viergutz, “I called the Quit Line and stayed on the phone with a quit coach for few minutes until my craving stopped.”

Viergutz also began to look forward to periodic phone “check in” calls from the Quit Line coaches who helped remind him of why he had made the decision to be tobacco free. “I still have the number on speed dial in my phone,” he says.

Viergutz believes the Montana Quit Line program and the Quit for Life Program at St. Peter’s were critical in helping him stay away from cigarettes.

“I also believe that successful quitting has to do with attitude and the fact that most people quit several times before they succeed. The secret is to just keep quitting.”

Some 16 percent of Montana adults smoke, as do nearly one-quarter of Montana’s young adults, aged 18 to 24 years. In Montana, 7 in 10 smokers are considering quitting smoking; additionally, nearly two-thirds of men who use spit tobacco say they would like to quit.

The Montana Tobacco Quit Line offers assistance to tobacco users who want to quit, including free cessation coaching, four weeks of FREE nicotine replacement therapy (gum, patches, or lozenges), and reduced-cost Chantix (\$25 co-pay). Calls are toll-free at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (784-8669).

For information on local cessation programs or the Quitline, contact Lewis and Clark County Tobacco Use Prevention Specialist, Darby Bramble, 447-8363.

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The Lewis & Clark City-County Health Department’s mission is to improve and protect the health of all Lewis & Clark County residents.