

DAILY NEWS

Daily News
Sunday, April 9, 2006

PENINSULA INTERFAITH ACTION
1336 ARROYO AVENUE TEL: 650-592-9181
SAN CARLOS, CA 94070-3913 FAX: 650-592-9183

Cigarette tax a step closer to ballot

BY AARON KINNEY
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

An affiliation of Peninsula faith groups raced to the finish line Saturday in its effort to gather its share of 1 million signatures needed to place a tobacco tax measure on the November ballot.

Peninsula Interfaith Action, a group of 31 congregations in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties representing nine faith traditions, has joined efforts with hospital groups and children's advocates to raise approximately \$2.27 billion a year by adding a \$2.60 tax to cigarette packs sold in the state. If approved by California voters, the

'I think the most adamant people against it have been smokers, but we have been getting some smokers, because they think it'll help them quit.'

Signature gatherer John Anning

money raised would go toward providing health insurance for the state's unin-

sured children, among other programs.

Working with its statewide affiliate, PICO California, Peninsula Interfaith Action (PIA) committed to gathering 10,000 signatures at area congregations, grocery stores, shopping centers and bookstores. Though the official deadline doesn't arrive until May, PIA coordinator Diane Rolfe said the group had gathered 10,265 signatures as of Friday afternoon.

"This is the weekend that it will become official," Rolfe said Friday, "but it looks like we're already done."

On Saturday, John Anning and

See TAX MEASURE, page 55

TAX MEASURE

FROM PAGE 1

Linda Lehr-Anning greeted shoppers as they entered the Safeway on El Camino Real in Redwood City. The couple, who live in Emerald Hills and attend the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, said they had gathered about 35 signatures in three hours. They had gotten some of their support from an unlikely source.

"I think the most adamant people against it have been smokers," Anning said, "but we have been getting some smokers, because they think it'll help them quit."

In fact, one of the goals of the tobacco tax is to create a reason for people to not smoke.

In addition to providing health

insurance for children, money from the tax would go to hospital emergency services (\$828 million), disease prevention and control programs (\$292 million) and programs to help young and old smokers break the habit (\$194 million), according to PICO California. Among the organizations supporting the tax are the California Hospital Association, the American Heart Association and the American Cancer Society.

As Anning and Lehr-Anning were talking, two students from Sequoia High School who were also gathering signatures approached. Viral Shah, a junior, and Lauren Ponti, a senior, are members of an American Cancer

Society club at Sequoia.

Shah said his older brother founded the club after their grandfather, though not a smoker, died of cancer.

"He started it about four years ago," Shah said. "After he graduated ... I took over the club and I'm currently the president."

Like Shah and Ponti, members of PIA were collecting the signatures on their own time. Rolfe said she was proud that PIA did not resort to employing paid signature gatherers.

"No one has been paid a penny," Rolfe said. "They're all volunteers."

Aaron Kinney can be reached at akinney@dailynewsgroup.com.