



November 2, 2107 --- Charlotte - Mecklenburg area thought leaders and advocates convened today at a Great American Smokeout Breakfast to address the continued health and social challenges, and economic burdens related to tobacco use.

While the rate of smoking has declined in the U.S., the rate of decline has not been as high in North Carolina as compared to national rate.

Today's speakers did, however, illustrate some bright spots in the quest to curb tobacco use. National, state and local strategies have contributed to the decline in the smoking rate and smoking cessation efforts, such as QuitlineNC, are credited with making progress and helping tobacco users quit the habit.

In addition, as Susan Kansagra, MD, NC Division of Public Health noted, "the benefits of the Quitline NC program and the related costs of administering it far outweigh the tremendous costs to our economy of not supporting such efforts. Pay now or pay later," Kansagra said. Investing in proven cessation and education programs now is much less costly than bearing the burden of health costs later when the impacts of smoking must be addressed.

Ken Szymanski, Executive Director of Greater Charlotte Apartment Association, shared many benefits of smoke-free multi-unit housing including creating a healthy environment free of secondhand smoke and providing more attractive communities for renters. Szymanski also added that the "economic impacts of smoke free housing are very real. The risk of fire damage decreases dramatically when smoking is restricted, which reduces insurance and other related costs."

The Charlotte area boasts one of the more proactive smoke-free multi-unit housing programs in the country, for apartment communities. The county stands as a model for other communities across the country.

Alisahah Cole, MD, VP and System Medical Director for Community Health at Carolinas HealthCare Systems, provided some striking statistics regarding the high use of tobacco among our less advantaged and minority residents of the community, a trend that must be halted. She

also emphatically highlighted that “tobacco use is the largest preventable cause of death and illness in the United States.” Promoting proven strategies that can impact that behavior will have a dramatic effect on chronic disease and reducing cost of health care.

While the calls to action shared at today’s thought leadership gathering sound simple, it will take the collective action of business, government, healthcare, nonprofit and concerned citizens working together to meet common goals.

Dale Fite President of Tyler 2 Construction, says “It can be done!” Fite shared the story of how Tyler 2 was able to radically reduce the high rates of smoking among its employees through implementing a tobacco-free worksite policy, much encouragement, cessation support, incentives and small steps. Tyler 2’s workforce is happier, healthier and has a renewed future ahead.

The event closed with the reading of a heart-felt poem written by CMS high school student and Behailu Academy participant, DeShaun Lynch. Prior to his reading, DeShaun described how he has been impacted by tobacco.

Today’s event was hosted by Tobacco-Free Meck and the Charlotte Chamber’s Healthy Charlotte Council. Kim Bayha, who is a leader with both organizations, summarized today’s robust conversations this way: “The event brought together nearly 100 leaders of our community committed to tackling tobacco use. We left with a strong agenda for action in hand and a passion to continue working collectively to make Charlotte one of the healthiest communities in the country. That’s success!”

For more information, visit:

[Healthy Charlotte Employer Toolkit](#)

[Tobacco-Free Worksites](#)

[Tobacco-Free Mecklenburg](#)

[QuitlineNC](#)

[Great American Smokeout](#)

"One Puff A Day"
Deshaun Lynch

Each puff you take a day
Is another breath away
But it is a closer breath
To your inevitable death
Risking your life, laying it at your feet
All to gain a momentary sense of relief
It's unfathomable
Its Unforgivable
Its Undeniable
That you've got a problem
You think that those smokes are gonna stop them
But you've become
The person to carry a stick of gum
To hide the smell of nicotine
It's deceitful, I'm not being mean
Brutally honest
That far too often
That sticks and smokes
Won't break your bones
Though it's too late to atone
Cause' you won't survive for far too long
Because those sticks took your breath away
Now you have no words left to say
This could've been prevented
If someone was committed and they meant it
Stop lighting up
Just say that's enough
Put down the stick
Because you can overcome it
If you don't, you're one puff away

Poem written by Deshaun Lynch, a senior at eLearning Academy, Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools and Behailu Academy, an arts-based youth development program in NoDa.