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Minnesotan wants to show you his lungs

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ST. CLOUD, Minn. (AP) - John Weber remembers watching "The Hit Parade" when he was young and seeing ads for Lucky Strikes. The first cigarette he smoked was a Lucky Strike, when he was 11.

Today, 49 years later, he still remembers the company's jingle.

But now, he's got a more permanent, poignant memory of cigarettes - one seared into his mind by seven weeks of painful radiation treatment for an inoperable lung tumor.

That's the one he wants you to know about.

Weber, 60, is on a mission. The self-described recluse is putting on full display what may eventually kill him - an image of his chest scan that reveals the tumor - in schools and on T-shirts and billboards throughout central Minnesota. The Long Prairie man is trying to spread the message he ignored for most of his life: Smoking has dire health consequences.

Weber was told Feb. 20 he had lung cancer and an inoperable tumor. Even before he was told, he knew.

"I wasn't scared and I wasn't angry," Weber said. "I was sad because of all the people I would miss."

Weber started smoking when he was 11 because a friend was doing it. He smoked for the next 49 years, never more than a pack a day, but quit about a year before he was diagnosed because he was getting emphysema and couldn't do athletic activities.

If he hadn't been in such good physical condition when diagnosed, he probably wouldn't have made it through treatment, he said.

Weber takes responsibility for his decisions. He doesn't feel like a victim, but he is angry with the tobacco companies for marketing a potentially deadly product. Weber's cancer is in remission, but he knows the odds are he will die within a few years.

So he's using what's left of his time to educate people about smoking. That's where the billboards, T-shirts and talks at schools come in.

Weber says he's been blunt and honest with the kids he's talked to so far. He knows it's not an easy thing to do, trying to persuade teenagers to not smoke. He says he probably wouldn't have listened to anyone who told him not to smoke when he was their age.

Weber's treatment lasted for seven weeks - five days a week of radiation, plus one day of chemotherapy. When he talks to students at area schools, which he just started doing, he doesn't mince words: "I say, 'Do you know what treatment's like? Boil a cup of water and drink it.'"

"I tell them two reasons not to smoke," Weber said. "Number 1, you're important. And Number 2, (the tobacco companies) are messing with you."

Weber said he's not asking for a lot. He tells the students, "I just want one of you not to smoke."

Dawn Burma, chemical health consultant for the Kimball school district, said Weber helps students put a face on lung cancer. Weber talked to Kimball students earlier this week.

"We do a lot of educating kids about the dangers of using tobacco, but what's missing is the ability for kids to personalize it and make it more real for them," Burma said. "At that age, they still think they are invincible."



05:00	EYEWITNESS NEWS LIVE AT 5
05:30	ABC WORLD NEWS TONIGHT
06:00	EYEWITNESS NEWS AT 6
06:30	FRIENDS
07:00	GEORGE LOPEZ
07:30	MARRIED TO THE KELLYS
08:00	HOPE & FAITH
08:30	LIFE WITH BONNIE
09:00	20/20
10:00	EYEWITNESS NEWS AT 10
10:35	ABC NEWS NIGHTLINE
11:05	THE KING OF QUEENS
11:35	DHARMA & GREG

Weber said he has spent a couple thousand dollars of his own money on T-shirts bearing an image of his chest scan, as well as the billboards with the same image. One billboard along Minnesota Highway 10 is already up; two more, including one that will be by Minnesota Highway 15 and Third Street, will soon appear. He sells the T-shirts for \$10 each. He said he will continue traveling to schools to speak as long as his health holds out.

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