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March 13, 2012

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Students Working Against Tobacco clubs are fighting back and ‘kicking butts’ on national Kick Butts Day

Youths from 14 Sarasota County clubs called Students Working Against Tobacco (SWAT) are fighting back and “kicking butts” on Wednesday, March 21, which is National Kick Butts Day. This is a national day of activism that empowers youth to build awareness about the health effects associated with tobacco use. They are also using this as a platform to illustrate how the tobacco industry targets them in its marketing. SWAT is Florida's statewide youth organization working to mobilize, educate and equip Florida youth to advocate against and deglamorize the tobacco industry.

“SWAT clubs from local schools and community organizations are planning edgy events to send the message to leaders that 28,700 Floridians die every year from a smoking related illness,” said Sarasota County Youth Tobacco Prevention Coordinator Hilary Woodcum. “Some of the activities planned include using props such as pairs of shoes or chalk outlines to represent those who die from smoking-related illnesses. Other SWAT clubs will hold up signs outside their location to promote Kick Butts Day, display memorial banners for those who have died from tobacco use, host a door decorating contest, conduct tobacco trivia games, and have students sign pledges to stay tobacco-free.”

Youth motivational speaker Patrick Perez, known for his unique and energetic programs, will provide presentations at Sarasota Middle School and Brookside Middle School on Tuesday, March 20, and at Suncoast Polytechnical High School and North Port High School on Wednesday, March 21.

Patrick has received rave reviews about how his story connects with youth and adults on a level to which they can relate. He shares how achievable goals, mentors and healthy choices can lead to an empowered life. Patrick believes every great dream comes at a great price. According to his website, he endured bullies as a kid, watched close friends join gangs as teens and ultimately danced his way into creating an awarding-winning teen success company as a young adult.

Preventing youth tobacco use is a critical step in combating the pervasive problem of tobacco, the leading cause of disease and preventable death in Florida. According to current data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Surgeon General Report, "Preventing Tobacco Use Among Young People," more than 300,000 Florida children will ultimately die prematurely from smoking.

Teen smoking has declined in recent years. However, 23.8 percent of high school students and 5.8 percent of middle school students in Sarasota County reported current cigarette use in the 2010 Florida Tobacco Youth Survey. This compares with the statewide average of 13 percent of Florida high school students, and 4.9 percent of Florida middle school students.

Kick Butts Day is organized by the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids and sponsored by the United Health Foundation.

In related news, students from Suncoast Polytechnical High School recently won the grand prize and third-place prize in a national public service announcement (PSA) contest hosted by the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids. According to the campaign's spokeswoman Marie Cocco, there were 112 entries in the PSA contest. The entries came from across the United States and from a military base in Germany. Participants were asked to create a 30-second video or radio spot that accurately portrays the tobacco problem by choosing topics and data that highlight the harmful effects and how tobacco companies are targeting them in their marketing.

Tobacco Free Florida offers a number of free and convenient resources to help Floridians quit tobacco. Among them are:

- **CALL:** Persons age 11 or older can call the Florida Quitline at 1-877-U-CAN-NOW to speak with a quit coach who will help the caller assess his/her addiction and create a personalized quit plan.
- **CLICK:** Persons age 13 or older can enroll in the Web Coach®, which will help them create your own Web-based quit plan. Visit <https://www.quitnow.net/florida>.
- **COME IN:** Others can sign up for Quit Smoking Now group classes at their local Area Health Education Center (AHEC) by calling 1-877-848-6696.

MEDIA NOTE: Links to the winning PSAs are provided below:

http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/tobacco_unfiltered/post/2012_02_22_psa

<http://vimeo.com/32138053>

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