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Community Meeting Announcement

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Tobacco-Free Lee Coalition **- A community organizational meeting -**

Fort Myers, FL- The Tobacco-Free Lee Coalition brings together the student and adult community, business and faith leaders to cut tobacco-use rates. The monthly organizational meeting is Tuesday, December 8, 2009 at 2:00 p.m. at Cypress Lake High School (room # E217) on 6750 Panther Lane, Ft. Myers. This meeting will host the by-laws ratification and an election, in which students are eligible to hold office.

The Tobacco-Free initiative is in response to the alarming rate of smokers in Lee County. Almost 20 percent of adults in Lee County smoke, youth light up more than the state average and 14 percent of pregnant women screened for special prenatal services reported smoking during pregnancy.

"We truly want to lower the numbers of youth who are starting smoking, and the women's issues are certainly of concern. Because the health department was recently awarded a three-year, \$600,000 state grant to address the high rates of tobacco usage in the county, we can develop programs targeted to the most vulnerable in our population, youth and pregnant women," said Brendan Donohue, tobacco program specialist, Lee County Health Department.

In Lee County, more women than men smoke — 22.6 percent vs. 16.4 percent. Among children, 5.7 percent of Lee County middle-schoolers reported smoking within 30 days of taking a behavioral risk survey and 18.4 percent of high-schoolers reported doing so. The statewide average rates were 5 percent and 14.5 percent, respectively.

Among the coalition's top goals will be to partner with the health care community to target pregnant women with a tobacco cessation intervention at every prenatal care visit and make sure they know about resources to help them quit. Also, the coalition wants to work toward enacting litter laws to curtail the cigarette butts collecting on county streets and beaches as well as pushing toward making all county buildings tobacco-free. Exact plans and strategies are being developed at coalition meetings. The public is welcome at all coalition meetings.

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