



Grand Rapids Creston students Kick Butts with wall of anti-smoking messages

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By **Sue Thoms | The Grand Rapids Press**

GRAND RAPIDS -- Creston High School students Wednesday covered a 10-by-12-foot wall with anti-smoking messages in celebration of **Kick Butts Day**, a national event dedicated to decreasing tobacco use and exposure to secondhand smoke among young people.

The wall of graffiti was set up by staff at the school health center run by Cherry Street Health Services. Students posted messages on the wall throughout the day, between classes and during lunchtime, said Kristin Batts, a social worker for Cherry Street Health Services.

Some students wrote simple messages like "Smoking kills." Others wrote that they wished their parents or friends would quit smoking.

"I didn't hear any negative reaction," Batts said.

Cherry Street also encouraged students at Union High School to sign pledges not to use tobacco.

Young people throughout the state took part in events marking the 16th annual Kick Butts Day, which is coordinated by Tobacco-Free Kids.



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Trevon Torres, 16, a student at Creston High School, signs the Kick Butts Day 2011 banner, on display at the Creston Health Center, a Cherry Street Health Services location.



According to the **Michigan Department of Community Health**, the youth smoking rate in Michigan has declined dramatically. It dropped from 38.2 percent in 1997 to 18.8 percent in 2009. However, the rate of high school students using spit tobacco rose 63 percent from 2003 to 2009.

And tobacco use remains a serious public health



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Itaejah Lucas, 15, a student at Creston High School, signs the Kick Butts Day banner.

threat. It is the No. 1 cause of preventable death in Michigan, killing more than 14,000 residents a year. Ninety percent of adult smokers began smoking before age 19, according to the health department.

Although she is encouraged by the decline in smoking, Batts said new products on the market raise concern. A number of tobacco and non-tobacco products that contain nicotine are being marketed as alternatives to smoking.

"Some even look like candy," she said. "I'm worried about some of these products appealing to kids, and kids not realizing what they're all about."

E-mail Sue Thoms: sthoms@grpress.com

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