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Teens Design Billboards to ‘Talk Back to Tobacco’

Teens from three counties have shared their thoughts about the dangers of tobacco through a billboard design contest sponsored by Lewis and Clark Public Health.

The contest winner was Josie Marks, from Jefferson High School. Second place was Ali Heimbach from the Project for Alternative Learning. Scout Lynde from Broadwater High School got third place, while Peta Compton, Emmalee Madden, and Kamryn Horne from Helena High School won fourth.

Thirty middle and high school students from Lewis and Clark, Jefferson, and Broadwater counties participated.

Marks’s first-place design will appear on a billboard on the east side of East Helena for eight weeks starting March 4. Heimbach’s second place design will be posted on the west side of Helena for four weeks.

The winning designs target the tobacco industry’s deceptive marketing toward youth. The first-prize entry encouraged youth not to be fooled by the “lies” of big tobacco.

“Teens have a powerful voice in convincing their peers to make healthy life choices,” said Sarah Sandau, tobacco prevention health educator at Lewis and Clark Public Health. “Considering that roughly 90 percent of adult tobacco users started before the age of 18, it’s important to focus our prevention efforts on this impressionable age group.”

The event was funded with a grant from reACT, a Montana youth-led movement to motivate students to take a stand against “Big Tobacco.” reACT stands for React Against Corporate Tobacco.

“Empowering youth to make healthy, informed choices about their bodies while they’re young is critical to their health and well-being throughout their lifetime,” Sandau said. “Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable deaths in our nation.”

For more information about reACT, the billboard competition, or tobacco-use prevention, contact the health department at 457-8924 or ssandau@lccountymt.gov