



## The Record Countdown to cleaner air

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Countdown to cleaner air -- Smokers brace for indoor ban starting Saturday

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As a soldier during World War II, George Astrella saved his monthly ration of cigarettes and made a bundle selling them in Germany after the fighting was over.

Never a smoker, Astrella, now 85 and the owner of Parkway Lanes in Elmwood Park, has taken a similarly pragmatic approach toward the statewide ban on smoking in most public places that goes into effect Saturday.

"No more ashtray expenses," he cracked late one recent night.

It seems the period of wailing and gnashing of teeth is over for many whose livelihoods stand to be affected by the ban, replaced by a grudging acceptance.

Starting Saturday, smokers who light up in restricted areas — and bar and restaurant owners who look the other way — will be subject to stiff fines. Only casinos and cigar bars that existed before the ban was passed in January are exempt.

New Jersey joins 15 other states that have enacted statewide "smoke-free" laws, according to the American Cancer Society. More than 2,000 U.S. cities and towns also have enacted smoking bans during the past decade, as well as the entire countries of Ireland and Scotland.

In New York City, where a ban has been in place since 2003, anecdotal evidence suggests the prohibition has had little if any negative impact on the city's hundreds of taverns, eateries and other entertainment establishments.

Astrella shrugged off the New Jersey law.

"I don't think it's going to hurt us in the least," he said, gazing out over 36 lanes of bowlers, more than a few of them taking an occasional puff on a cigarette.

One of them, Barry Goldsmith, a 40-year-old Newark resident, said the ban won't keep him from his regular Friday night games.

"Not me," he said.

How will he adjust?

After pausing briefly, he replied, "I guess you'll have to change your shoes if you go outside to smoke, or put something over them." (Bowlers wear special shoes that don't scuff the lanes.)

Astrella has hung big banners from the ceiling to remind smokers of the impending prohibition on lighting up.

One Hackensack business owner, meanwhile, believes he is all but certain to benefit from the ban.

"With all of the restrictions, people are going to look for places that are smoke-friendly, where they don't feel persecuted," said Ruben Abreu, owner of Ruben's Smoke Stack, a cigar shop and lounge on Main Street.

Even some bar owners suggested a possible silver lining once the smoke clouds clear.

Gene Faatz, proprietor of the Orange Lantern, a neighborhood tavern in Paramus just off Route 17, said business actually might improve at lunchtime and in the early evening once the ban goes into effect.