

Don't look like an old hag

Thank you for not smoking

Two different crusaders against smoking were pictured in last Wednesday's paper: Mayor Jim Dailey of Little Rock and Chioma Thompson, a fourth-grader at Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School. Of the two, it was the young lady who had the better idea. Miss Chioma was shown holding her hand-painted poster with its picture of a mouthful of ugly stained teeth, and the warning that smoking "makes your teeth brown." Her own teeth, set in a fetching smile, looked great: white, strong, and definitely not nicotined.

The mayor's approach was less positive and more punitive: a series of proposed new ordinances that targeted tobacco dealers. Some of the proposals sounded like good ideas—like forbidding dealers from distributing free smokes to minors. But others toyed with the dealers' (and therefore everybody's) freedom of speech. For example, the mayor would restrict outdoor advertisements for tobacco products to black-and-white text.

Miss Chioma may have been smiling because she knows it pays to advertise, and that the most effective way to counter all the inducements for youngsters to smoke is counter-advertising. Like her poster. It relies on a far more powerful weapon than more rules and regulations: fashion.

Think about it: It isn't just the law or education or medical findings or nagging in general that have made so much of America smoke-free but a new and increasingly dominant consensus: Smoking isn't cool. It's not just the expense and emphysema, the coughing and cancer that have eroded smoking's

deceptive charm. It's because smoking "makes your teeth brown," among other decidedly unfashionable consequences. Like looking like a corpse.

You can tell smoking's out these days because the movies don't make a fetish of it the way they used to, and what better gauge of fashion than the films we watch?

Conclusion: The mayor and his fellow crusaders against the demon weed would do well to take their cure from Chioma Thompson. She knows something about American psychology. Laws can only attempt to regulate; fashion decrees.

If you've got a great product, like good health and good looks, the best way to push it is to advertise it. (Imagine what an advertising campaign the size of the smoking industry's could accomplish if directed at young people.)

Besides, people can be against something—like smoking—only so long. After a while, they want to be for some things. Like pearly whites and

looking like a movie star or a high-school athlete. Like being able to run a hundred yards whenever you need to catch a bus or maybe just because you want to. Like slamming a few by a rival on the tennis court. Like good health and clean breath and—surest seller of all—being attractive to the opposite sex. The folks trying to keep the next generation smoke-free have a lot more powerful weapon than law; it's called style. Cigarettes seem to have gone out of it. Call it a lifestyle.

This message has been brought to you courtesy of your friends at the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette and Miss Chioma Thompson, who's got the right idea.

