

Stamp Out Smoking part of SOTM

■ The anti-smoking campaign will be a partner in the sponsorship of the annual community festival.

By PAT IVEY

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A new partner in the Main Street Blytheville Springtime on the Mall festival this year is the Stamp Out Smoking (SOS) campaign, which has become a major festival sponsor.

According to information provided by SOS, tobacco use is the single most preventable cause of death and disease in Arkansas. Forty-four percent of high school students use tobacco products and 36 percent of adults smoke. It is estimated that \$604 million is

spent annually for health care in Arkansas directly related to tobacco.

The Tobacco Prevention and Education Program (TPEP) introduced the SOS campaign to educate Arkansans about the dangers of tobacco use.

In response to a request for proposals for local coalition and community-based program grants, TPEP received 150 letters of intent, and 250 people attended day-long seminars in January. Grants will be awarded by June 2002, and these grants will be used to

build coalitions with diverse partners; create tobacco-free environments; reduce youth access; decrease advertising and promotion of tobacco products; and promote the utilization of cessation resources.

TPEP team members have started organizing a statewide youth program called Students Working Against Tobacco (SWAT). The program will use peer influence to reduce the use of tobacco products among students of all ages, schedule and conduct youth summits, and assist local anti-tobacco coalitions.

Of the 19 nurses to be employed through the program, the statewide nursing coordinator has been hired. The nurses will provide tech-

nical assistance to schools with the implementation of the Center for Disease Control's Guidelines for School Health Programs to Prevent Tobacco Use and Addiction.

Springtime on the Mall will take place from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, April 27, on Main Street in downtown Blytheville.

SOS will set up an information booth on the children's block in front of Farmer's Bank and Trust as part of the festival.

"We think this is a perfect fit for Springtime on the Mall, because it will help education children on the dangers of smoking," said George Hubbard, Main Street Blytheville President.