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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Youth smoking in West Virginia has declined

The numbers quoted in your recent editorial about youth smoking in West Virginia were correct when they were published in the 2002 Youth Tobacco Survey. When that survey was conducted, the West Virginia Division of Tobacco Prevention was just beginning to plan a statewide media campaign to address youth tobacco use and prevention.

Youth smoking rates in West Virginia declined 32 percent, from 42.2 percent in 1999 to 28.5 percent in 2003. The 2005 numbers have not been released, but we expect to see at least another small decrease in youth smoking prevalence.

West Virginia launched the Raze program in May of 2002. The goal of Raze is to create a statewide youth anti-tobacco movement that gets teens involved and reduces tobacco use because teens tell other teens tobacco use is harmful.

Since its inception we have seen the youth led, youth empowered program reach every county in the State and influence countless teens and their families. During the 2005-2006 school year there were more than 8,500 Raze members statewide. More than 5,100 of those are new members this school year. The 151 Raze crews (groups) this year have conducted 2,300 commotions to get the word out about tobacco in their schools and communities.

The West Virginia Division of Tobacco Prevention is also committed to helping smokers in the school quit with its support of the NOT Program... The NOT Program is a gender specific stop smoking program that was designed specifically for teens by researchers at West Virginia University. The American Lung Association adopted it to be used nationwide and results show that it works.