

A crusade to snuff out smoking

R.J. Reynolds heir tries to undo family legacy of damage

By Robert Channick
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

As a scion of America's first family of tobacco, Patrick Reynolds would seem an unlikely crusader in the campaign to curtail smoking. But after watching his father, brother, aunt and other relatives succumb to tobacco-related illnesses, the grandson of R.J. Reynolds is eager to bite the nicotine-stained hand that once fed him.

Reynolds offered a unique perspective and a powerful anti-smoking message in a recent presentation at Saint Francis Hospital in Evanston.

"The more I learned about the tobacco industry, the angrier I became," said Reynolds, 61. "As a Reynolds, I get to make a difference on the tobacco issue by fighting back."

A noted anti-smoking advocate for more than two decades, Reynolds and his family have long since parted ways with the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co., the nation's second-largest purveyor of cigarettes, which was founded in 1874 by Richard Joshua Reynolds.

Richard Joshua Reynolds Jr. inherited great tobacco wealth after the patriarch died in 1918, but he

pursued myriad interests outside the business. Estranged from his father for years after his parents' divorce, Patrick Reynolds became reacquainted with him as a 9-year-old — just in time to witness the onset of his emphysema.

"My only memories of my father are of a man lying down, gasping for breath," Reynolds said.

While Reynolds received a



Patrick Reynolds addresses an audience at Saint Francis Hospital in Evanston, where he shares a photo of his father, R.J. Reynolds Jr., who had emphysema. SHAUNA BITTLE/PHOTO FOR THE TRIBUNE

modest inheritance, he divested all his company stock in 1979, forsaking the tobacco industry for good. Following his own path, Reynolds pursued an acting career, culminating in a starring role in the 1986 cult sci-fi film "Eliminators."

year he launched the Foundation for a Smokefree America (www.anti-smoking.org), a California-based nonprofit aimed at education and legislation.

Reynolds has supported the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, a measure that allows the Food and Drug Administration to regulate the manufacture,

marketing and distribution of tobacco products. The bill was signed into law in June 2009 by President Barack Obama, an admitted closet smoker who has struggled to kick his own habit.

Reynolds spoke at Saint Francis Hospital as part of the hospital's monthlong focus on heart health. The hospital is a leader in cardiac care.

About 440,000 deaths are

attributed to smoking-related illnesses each year. While many people associate smoking with lung cancer, it is also a leading cause of heart disease. Smoking increases blood pressure, decreases exercise tolerance and increases the tendency for blood to clot, the American Heart Association says.

It is never too soon to quit: In just one year off cigarettes, the excess risk of coronary heart disease is reduced by half, and after 15 years, the risk is comparable with those who have never smoked, the AHA says.

Now living in California with his wife and their newborn child, Reynolds has found that severing ties with the tobacco industry equally cathartic.

"I have chosen this work partly to honor my father," he said. "I think he's up in heaven rooting me on, along with my grandfather."

HEALTH

WELLNESS

Annual noon Saturday Welland Road Race. Includes Ad Lake County Courthouse. Free. Family History p.m. Saturday. Streamwood park.

MENTAL

Family-to-family course for serious mental illness. Alliance of Suburban Northfield. Free, space 2252.

SEMINAR

Managing Youth and Family Series. Ship, 1700 person and \$7 and \$8. nancial aid. Michelle L. mainetow

CHILD CARE

Immunity from any appointment. Estates reorganizer. man Estate. Cost \$5 for check or A records. C.

LECTURE

Spirituality. Bosler, 7:30 Center for Lane, Arlington. required. S. Mental Illn

PARKING

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