

Community Change Chronicles

Biscuitville Restaurants in North Carolina Go Smoke-Free

Process of Creating Change

Biscuitville, a restaurant chain with 48 locations in North Carolina and Virginia, decided to go smoke-free at its 40 North Carolina locations in 1999.

Founded in 1975 this was a business ready to change. Realizing that its customer base was youth on their way to school, senior citizens and families, the family owned company decided to put the health of its customers and employees first. Although typically it is much easier for a restaurant to open smoke-free rather than become smoke-free later, this chain showed North Carolina that it could be done.

In the mid-1990s Guilford County Project ASSIST staff contacted Biscuitville management during routine updates to their restaurant guide publication. The restaurant expressed some interest in going smoke-free and said they'd think about it. At the time they declined an offer of assistance in doing a pilot at 1-2 locations, explaining that because the chain was family run and since only a few people would be making the decision about this, they would not necessarily need to proceed as larger corporations might. During the next update of the restaurant guide, ASSIST contacted the Biscuitville location again. They were told that the restaurant was ready for a pilot and had already identified locations in Guilford County and Wake County. They didn't need any technical assistance in Guilford, but did request recognition for their efforts, which ASSIST was able to do through the Health Department. Biscuitville did request some assistance in Wake County, so the two pilots were conducted according to the restaurants' needs.

Two years later when ASSIST was updating the restaurant guide again, they contacted Biscuitville for further follow up. They were told that following the pilot they had tried two additional locations (one in Greensboro and one in Forsyth County) with no negative affects. They had then decided to make the entire chain throughout North Carolina smoke-free. They had even taken the initiative to do their own signs.

Importance of Change

Biscuitville was an important victory for smoke free restaurants in North Carolina for a number of reasons. The popularity of the chain and the large number of young customers they serve ultimately mean an impact to many. In terms of the process of policy change it shows that many times restaurant owners are willing to make a change and work best with very little assistance from tobacco control staff. In this instance 40 locations eventually became smoke-free with the restaurant needing little more than recognition for its efforts

Lessons Learned

- Much of the success of this effort was due to the fact that the chain was family run with a small number of decision-makers. At times, fewer decisionmakers can make change very easy to achieve.
- Recognition was important to this chain. Stay in touch with those restaurants that you've contacted for your smoke-free guides. This chain was ready to make the change, but had the ASSIST Coalition not maintained contact with them, it's possible that ASSIST wouldn't have been able to offer its assistance to ensure success.
- Find out what the business wants and then deliver. Acknowledge the expertise that restaurant owners bring in knowing their customers. In this case the owners identified on their own which locations they wanted to start with and had different needs at these locations. ASSIST met those needs and built a relationship that has enabled them to use this restaurant as a model.

Type of Change	Environmental Policy
Risk Factor Addressed	Environmental Tobacco Smoke
Location of Change	Biscuitville locations in North Carolina
Reach/Impact of Change	Employees and customers

