

Westside Weekly SUNDAY

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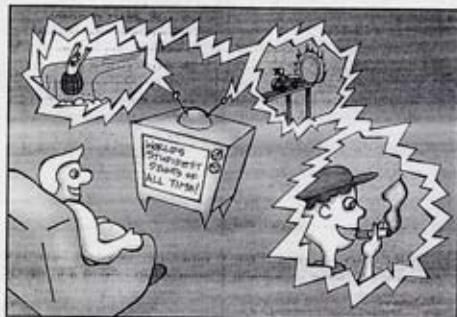
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Lending a hand in battle against teen smoking

AnimAction program teams teens with animators to create anti-tobacco TV ads

LISLE PARELLA

Westside Weekly



STUPID STUNTS
"SMOKING IS A STUPID STUNT"

When it comes to the battle against teen smoking, some youths have literally taken the matter into their own hands.

Teenagers are putting pens to paper to create animated anti-smoking public service announcements for radio and television.

The nonprofit AnimAction filmmaking company teams up local animators with Los Angeles Unified School District middle-school students. After students learn the tricks of animation, their work is aired on network

and cable television. The teens who created the most effective and original ads last year were recently honored

at a UCLA awards ceremony, with celebrities and animation industry professionals as judges and awards presenters. "I think the program does two things: It creates an awareness in the school population that tobacco use is bad for your health, and it serves as an outlet for kids to experiment with their talent," said Patrick Beaulieu, who teaches at Emerson Middle School in Pacific Palisades.

Beaulieu believes the program works because kids teach kids.

"Adults aren't telling them what to do," he said.

Sagirah Thomas and other Emerson students can't wait to

go through the program again next year.

"It gives kids a chance to see what the animators do and how fun and hard it is to be an animator," Sagirah said.

One billion packs of cigarettes are consumed by children and adolescents each year in the United States, a figure that continues to grow, according to the National Commission on Drug-Free Schools.

Aimed at curtailing this trend, AnimAction gives students a 12-hour animation workshop, where they learn to produce the 30-second ads.

Other statistics show that adolescents who never smoked before are more likely to try cig-

arettes after being exposed to tobacco advertising and promotions, according to a 1998 study in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Ad campaigns like AnimAction's program try and blunt that tendency. Funding for AnimAction comes from Proposition 99, the state tax on tobacco products.

AnimAction's founder, Clifford Cohen, believes the program teaches youngsters more than animation and the dangers of smoking.

"The program also teaches kids a combination of people and media skills that will help them in the future," Cohen said.