

Anti-smoking message delivered at Brother Andre

Whistle-blower stays on the attack

BY FRED SIMPSON
Staff Writer

He single-handedly took on the giants of the American tobacco companies, survived corporate deceit, lawsuits, death threats, political coverups and crooked lawyers.

And he came out a winner against all odds.

He's Dr. Jeffery Wigand, the corporate whistle blower who rode to instant notoriety with his appearance on 60 Minutes, the award-winning television show which brought the powerful tobacco industry to its knees.

Wigand was at Markham's Brother Andre Catholic High School last week where he captivated 900 Grade 9 students with his powerhouse attacks against the tobacco industry.

In a riveting speech, delivered while he strode up and down the aisles of the pack auditorium, Wigand told the students that "smoking-related diseases kill 130,000 people annually in the United States and 45,000 in Canada.

"By the year 2010 you will be looking at total of 10-million smoking-related casualties," said Dr. Wigand. "Smoking is a worldwide epidemic."

Wigand is the former vice-president and head of scientific research for the Brown & Williamson tobacco company and subject of the Oscar-nominated movie, *The Insider*.

Wigand detailed how he was first hired and then fired by the tobacco company and later faced a barrage of intimidating tactics.

At the height of the intimidation campaign he found a bullet in his home mailbox.

"Someone was obviously trying to deliver a chilling message to me, my wife and family," he said.

Wigand punched out his points in rapid-fire, dramatically telling the students that "every cigarette you smoke takes 11 minutes out of your life.

"There is no question that smoking

leads to addiction, that it's the most predictable form of death in North America and the world."

Smoking and related diseases cause more deaths than car accidents, homicides, guns, and wars combined, he said.

He called on each student to become actively involved in the community in convincing young people that smoking "is not a glamorous recreation but a deadly one.

"Cigarettes," he said, "are more dangerous than heroin or cocaine, believe it or not."

In addition, he noted non-smokers exposed to secondary smoke are in as much danger as smokers themselves.

He pointed out that the 4,000 to 8,000 chemical compounds contained in cigarette tobacco are "so deadly you cannot legally bury them in your garbage dump because they are too toxic.

"Yet we allow these tobacco companies to glamorize smoking as a fun thing to do and especially encourage our children to take up this deadly habit."

"This is an industry that preys upon children and lifetime of addiction which ends as a horrifying statistic," he said.

The American tobacco industry spends \$6.7 billion on advertising every year and spends \$600 million alone on legal fees, Wigand said.

He flayed the industry for its legal obfuscations, its clever use of the media, intimidations, duping and manipulation of politicians.

"They know how to get to you by giving to the arts, you see their logo on the ski slopes and at jazz festivals."

Wigand said his goal was to get his "message through to one person every day.

"I want the young people to get out there and become social activists in terms of affecting change and making the future better, not just for them, but for their children and their children's

children."

If, he said, at the "end of the day I have saved one life, then it's all worth it."

Wigand received worldwide publicity when he appeared on the 60 Minutes CBS television show and revealed that the cigarette industry not only knew that nicotine was addictive but also used additives to make it more addictive, including one known carcinogen.

The presidents of seven cigarette companies had denied under oath before Congress it had used additives to make their product even more addictive.

Dr. Wigand's subsequent testimony resulted in a \$246 billion settlement brought against the tobacco industry by the 50 states.

His struggle for justice was portrayed in the film, *The Insider*, a thriller directed by Michael Mann and starring Al Pacino, Christopher Plummer and Russell Crow, as Dr. Wigand.

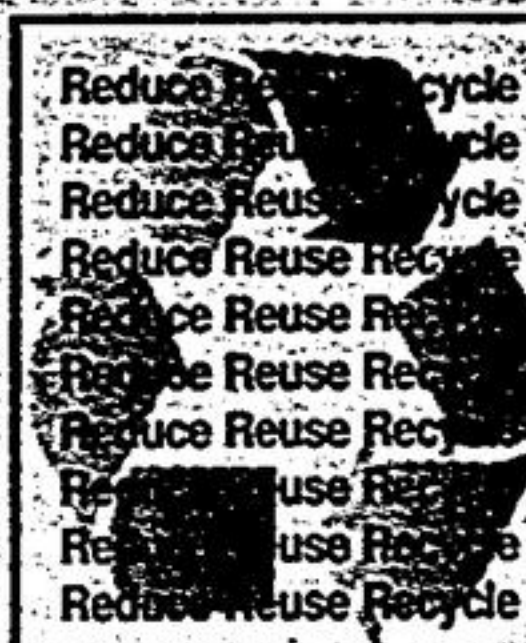
He has since founded a non-profit foundation called Smoke-Free Kids and uses his knowledge of the tobacco industry to educate children about how the industry uses the entertainment business and deceptive advertising to hook children on tobacco for life.

His visit to Brother Andre and St. Elizabeth in Thornhill was arranged by St. Elizabeth's religion teacher Tony Muhitch and intended to kick off to the teacher advisor program's anti-smoking theme year.

"It's interesting to realize that an estimated 10-million people will die by the Year 2010," said Muhitch.

"We would use the word holocaust or genocide to describe that kind of statistic coming from any other single source."

The event was sponsored by the York Region Chinese Anti-tobacco Public Education Coalition which is funded by the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care, under the Ontario Tobacco Strategy.



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