

Tobacco whistleblower addresses Academy students

Holding a frozen human brain in his hand, Dr. Victor DeNoble had definitely gotten the attention of his audience. Speaking to The Academy students recently about the dangers of smoking, the scientist and former researcher for the Philip Morris Tobacco Co., brought out the brains of a rat, a monkey and a human — as he described the addictive properties of cigarette nicotine.

“Teens’ brains are still developing until approximately age 24, and the developing brains are more sensitive to heat, light, sound and drugs. Nicotine is a drug,” shared DeNoble. “It takes five to 10 years for the effects of nicotine to totally leave the central nervous system.”

At the insistence of Drug Free Charlotte County, the Department of Health and Charlotte Behavioral Health Care, DeNoble spoke with community leaders at a breakfast hosted by Charlotte Behavioral, students at The Academy, and L. A. Ainger Middle School, as well as appearing on Ken Lovejoy’s ClearChannel program. DeNoble had previously visited area schools about a year and a half ago, and speaks to more than 350,000 middle and high school students nationally per year and 100,000 college students a year. Many of those college students who first heard DeNoble as grade schoolers, have successfully lived tobacco-free, and are responsible for bringing DeNoble onto their campuses, to benefit their peers.

As stated in his online biography, http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Victor_J._De-Noble, in 1994, after the U.S. Congress released him from a confidentiality agreement with Philip Morris, DeNoble became the first “Whistleblower” to begin speaking out against the tobacco industry. He served as a key witness in the federal government’s case against the industry and has testified before Congress, the Food and Drug Administration and former Vice President Al Gore’s Tobacco Settlement Committee. He has been featured on several television shows including “60 Minutes,” “Dateline NBC” and “Sunday Morning with David Brinkley.” The 1999 movie “The Insider,” starring Russell Crowe and Al Pacino, was based on DeNoble’s life work.

He went on to testify before Congress, playing a key role in settlements against tobacco companies, where the industry agreed to pay more than \$200 billion toward medical costs associated with cigarette smoke. In turn, those settlements directly paid for DeNoble’s Charlotte County visit, using tobacco prevention grant funds from the settlements.

DeNoble made it clear: “I did not come here to tell you what to do, but to convey information, so you, as students, can make informed choices”.

After Dr. DeNoble’s visit to our local schools last year, several students ceased using tobacco, and many were touched by these presentations. DFCC regularly speaks with students who agree that they have tried cigarettes or chewing tobacco, initially, just to be like their parents or older friends.



PHOTO PROVIDED

Dr. Victor DeNoble shares about his experiences as a research scientist for Philip Morris. On the screen behind him is a photo: “On April 14, 1994, the CEO’s of our seven major U.S. tobacco companies, flatly denied, while under oath, that nicotine is addictive and that smoking causes cancer,” according to the House Health and Environment Subcommittee hearing.