

By LAUREN VINCENT

In late February, the Kansas Legislature passed House Bill 2221 which will ban smoking in most public buildings across the state. On March 12, Governor Mark Parkinson signed the bill into law.



Many local businesses have recently been turning to a smoke-free atmosphere of their own accord, however, beginning July 1, it will no longer be a decision left to individual business owners. Smoking, across the state, will be illegal in bars, restaurants, taxicabs and workplaces. A few areas, such as state-owned casinos and certain private clubs, will not be affected by this ban.

“I haven’t found out for sure, since we’re a private club, if it’s going to affect us or not,” said Jerry Jensen, co-owner of the Hitch-N-Post Saloon. Robert Burkey of Ayr-Lanes, on the other hand, knows the new law will influence his business.

“I’m sure it will impact my business; it will change my customers,” said Burkey.

He felt he was already satisfying his non-smoking customer base by providing specific times for those who did want to smoke as well as times for those who did not.

“I’m not going to be able to change the rules so I will abide by them, and I will do everything I can to make all my customers happy” he said.

While everything possible will be done to keep customers satisfied during the transition, some business owners are not overly thrilled about the ban.

“The part I don’t like about the whole thing is, well, they’re dictating my business,” Burkey said. “They’re doing something I felt like I could do myself.”

Jensen agreed.

“As far as my personal feelings go, it should be up to the owners,” Jensen said. “I thought it should be left up to the discretion of the business owner, especially if it’s a bar.” Cattleman’s Carolyn Mayhew believed the impact will be more substantial for bars than for restaurants.

“People can eat and leave and still smoke and their lives aren’t disrupted,” she said. “I think the real people it will affect are those that have bars. Smoking and drinking goes hand in hand. Going out for an evening – five hours, drinking without smoking – that’s going to be a problem.”

The effects of the new ban are not seen as a terrible threat and will most likely be short-term, according to Mayhew.

“If it’s across the board, it’s not like I personally made the decision not to have smokers and then I have all the pressure on me,” Mayhew explained. “This way, the state is the bad person, and I can just sympathize.”

Jensen agreed – somewhat.

“Main thing depends on, if all the other businesses are having to do it,” Jensen. “It might affect business some, but I think customers will probably come back eventually because if they want to go out and have a good time, they have to come somewhere.”

“It doesn’t scare me to the point to where I think we’re going to have a problem,” Burkey said. “Will we lose people? Will we gain people? Probably both.”

Some of the effects of the ban may even be positive from the business standpoint, according to some.

“You can sit back and look at it like it’s going to take away your business or you can sit back and look at it like it opens up a new potential business base for me,” Burkey said.

“I’m not upset about it,” Mayhew said. “I won’t have to worry about ashtrays being dumped into the trash cans and having trash can fires. I won’t have to worry about employees sitting down and smoking at a table. So it solves a lot of problems for me.”

As far as how owners will attempt to support their valued customers during the transition, a few ideas are circulating.

Jensen mentioned possibly building a smoking patio behind the saloon if the ban affects his private club.

“I will wait and see,” Burkey said. “I will be talking with my current customers, my league bowlers, and finding out just what kind of an impact it’s going to have for them, and I’ll make my adjustments from there.”

The new law also prohibits smoking within 10 feet of a doorway. For businesses on streets with a door every 20 feet or less, this provision may cause certain stretches of sidewalk to become completely smoke-free.

Because of the implication this has for downtown areas, House committee members are already considering changes to the bill. The allowances in their proposed counteractive House Bill 2741 would push the ban back a further six months, decrease the distance one must be from a doorway from 10 to three feet at certain businesses, and allow bars or casinos which sell lottery and keno tickets to be excused from the ban. It is unknown if that bill will move out of committee to be voted on.