

Smokers' airline will place non-smokers at rear of plane

DALLAS (AP) — It sounds like a smoker's dream: an airline on which they can light up and where non-smokers will have to sit in the back of the plane.

Dallas entrepreneur Kay Cohlmlia is preparing to offer such a service from Oklahoma City and Dallas to Las Vegas.

He said service will begin at Will Rogers World Airport on Oct. 1 regardless of a U.S. Department of Transportation prohibition against smoking on airline flights of less than six hours' duration.

Although he calls his proposed operation an airline, Cohlmlia also refers to it as a smoking club, which he says can operate under less restrictive charter flight smoking rules.

Cohlmlia said he will charge passengers a \$10 annual fee for flying privileges to justify calling his American Smokers' Airline a club.

Then, as he envisions it, a traveler yearning for gambling casino pleasures can report to the boarding gate at the Dallas-Fort Worth or Oklahoma City airports, flash a membership card and buy a low-rate ticket to Las Vegas on American Smokers' Airline.

Once aboard the plane, which Cohlmlia says will resemble a lighted cigarette, the passenger can light up, order a drink and buy cigarettes by the car-

Dallas entrepreneur will offer services in spite of regulations

ton at bargain rates.

The next stop is Las Vegas.

He says his new airline will begin service Oct. 1, although officials at Will Rogers Airport in Oklahoma City say he hasn't told them about it.

"We'll contact one of the airlines already in Oklahoma City to get a boarding gate at Will Rogers," Cohlmlia said.

As for advising Will Rogers officials of his plans, he said, "Las Vegas welcomed me and DFW (the Dallas-Fort Worth Air-

port) welcomed me. Why not Oklahoma City?"

Cohlmlia said he decided to start the airline as a reaction to the negative treatment smokers have been getting recently.

"It's getting to the point that everyone is discriminating against us smokers," he said.

His personal view of smoking, he said, is "If you smoke, that's your business."

"If I smoke, that's my business. If we both smoke, that's our business."

Cohlmlia said he will charge members \$199 per round-trip ticket to Las Vegas ei-

ther from Dallas or Oklahoma City if they pay cash 10 days in advance.

Twenty percent of the seats on each flight will be reserved for non-smokers — in the back where he said ventilation is better.

The gravelly-voiced Cohlmlia said he was born in Wichita, Kan., lived in Enid as a child and attended Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford.

He said he is a two-pack-a-day smoker, but he said he has been trying to quit.

"I quit every morning. Sometimes I go till noon," he said.

Why does he keep trying to quit if it's so tough?

"It's a filthy, disgusting habit," he said.

Dentist makes attempt to dispel AIDS rumor

BAYTOWN (AP) — A dentist plagued by false rumors and terrified patients mailed letters to 3,000 families and colleagues to dispel the myth he was suffering from AIDS.

Dr. David R. Wooten, with a 20-year practice, a wife and three children, found himself reassuring nearly all his patients, who had heard he had the contagious and fatal disease.

Alarmed, Wooten quickly traced the rumor back through more than a dozen people, including a worker at another den-

tal office in town.

In an effort to kill the rumor, Wooten mailed about 3,000 letters to patients and other dentists around Baytown, about 20 miles east of Houston, to assure them he was healthy and that he and his staff had been tested and were clear of the human immunodeficiency virus.

"The U.S. mail is not any faster than a Baytown rumor," Wooten said. "I felt open communication was the best solution to everything, rather than just sticking my head in the sand. Because

of the nature of AIDS, it is a blank screen for people to project their fears."

He said dentists are getting a bum rap since a Florida dentist, Dr. David Acer, became the first health professional known to have infected patients with AIDS before dying of it himself in September 1990. Some experts blamed the transmission of the disease on inadequate sterilization procedures.

The Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta says the chance of contracting AIDS through a den-

tal procedure is about 1 in 2.6 million.

The Baytown rumors had Wooten being ill lately, losing a lot of weight and watching his staff walk out.

None of it was true, he said. "I still have no earthly idea how the rumor started," he said.

"I had not seen any detrimental effect on my patient caseload from the rumor, but I didn't want to take any chances," Wooten said. "Sometimes I might not see some of them for six months or a year."

Senate approves funding for wildlife refuge

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — The acting president of the Frontera Audubon Society said valley environmentalists will be closely watching a House-Senate conference committee, which will consider a proposal to acquire 10,000 acres for the Lower Rio Grande Natural Wildlife Refuge.

The U.S. Senate approved \$7 million last week for the project.

The funding proposal, part of a multi-mil-

lion dollar package for a variety of outdoor projects in the Texas Panhandle, the Valley, and the San Antonio area, now goes to conference committee.

"It's just crucial that we get this money," Maurie Haas, acting president of the Frontera Audubon Society, told the San Antonio Express-News on Saturday.

The House has already approved \$5 mil-

lion for the project and Ms. Haas said she expects the two branches to split the difference in their funding proposals.

Environmentalists frequently testify for funds for the refuge, which was established in the late 1970s. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service usually has funds in hand by December to keep the refuge growing, she said.

Sen. Lloyd Bentsen, D-Texas, pushed for the funds.

Oil industry expects decline in drilling rigs

HOUSTON (AP) — The nation's drilling rig count — the most-watched barometer in the oil patch — is expected to fall to 750 next year, marking the lowest level of domestic drilling activity in a half century.

The bellwether number soared above 4,500 during the glory days of the Texas energy boom.

The drop to 750 would be the lowest level since 1942 when the demands of a war in Europe gobbled up the nation's steel supply, making it impossible to build the platforms and pipelines needed to keep the crude flowing.

Today, however, the industry's woes aren't nearly as fleeting.

A two-year decline in the price of natural gas and a steady drop in the nation's oil output has prompted a flight of people, companies and money from the U.S. oil industry.

That combined with the sagging rig count, has added to the anxiety of an industry already worried that its heyday may be over.

"We are seeing a fundamental shift in the U.S. that just won't support a larger rig count," said Richard Spears, vice president of Spears & Associates, a Tulsa, Okla., energy consulting company.

"It's a sad thing," he told the Houston Chronicle. "We've been the leader forever. It's just not the case anymore."

While it is impossible to gauge the health of an entire industry solely on the rig count projections — particularly since the estimates often are wrong — experts say the lower numbers serve as an important indicator of the industry's sliding health.

The count is expected to average about 874 rigs this year, down 13.5 percent from 1,010 in 1990, according to Baker Hughes.

"We are an endangered species," warns Raymond Plank, chairman of Apache Corp., an independent energy company moving from Denver to Houston. "Right now, we can use all the help we can get."

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