Managers of local lounges still debating how their outlets will comply with new state law

By Carolyn Lee
The Imperial Republican

As of June 1, all Nebraska indoor worksites are to be smoke-free. In February of 2008, LB 395 was passed by the Nebraska Legislature and signed by Governor Dave Heineman.

LB 395 provides protection for smoke-free air at most indoor worksites throughout the state, and includes industrial sites, offices, convenience stores, bars and restaurants.

The law doesn't affect most Imperial area public places. Chase County Community Hospital, Imperial Manor, the courthouse, the city offices and all restaurants are already smoke-free.

Not so for the Eagles Club and the VFW. The Eagles Club is a combination restaurant/bar, while the "V" is a bar for veterans and their guests.

Managers for both establishments indicated last week that no definite plans have been approved yet for providing space separate from the buildings for smokers. Both plan, however, to provide such a spot.

Charlie Beard of the Eagles Club said the board is "talking about going to the north side by the pool tables, putting a door in and adding a walled-in area with a roof."

"I don't know what we're going to do, to tell you the truth," he added.

"If we don't get anything done people could walk outside (to smoke) but they couldn't take a drink with them," he said.

Beard said smokers could use the beer garden to the south of the building, but it's not "very handy" to the main bar, which is on the north side.

If a building was erected for smokers, it would have to have a separate wall from the present building, Beard said. He added that in his opinion it should be comfortable and a place for those who aren't smoking, also.

"The state doesn't really know what you can do. The guidelines aren't really clear," he stated.

Darlene Jens at the VFW said some of her customers are OK with the smoking ban, while others said they "won't be back."

She said members have discussed putting up a small building to the east of the VFW that would be standing room only with trash cans for ashtrays.

"We don't want them to be too comfortable out there. We want them back inside" where they would be buying drinks, she noted.

Jens emphasized that no plans have been approved yet, and that it would be "an expensive deal if it (the ban) doesn't go," in reference to any construction plans.

She said the recent increase in tax on cigarettes has hurt the VFW. "We lose smokers, so the federal government is losing money again" with the tax increase, she said.

Some customers have indicated to her that they'll quit smoking because of the prices, and will continue to patronize the "V."

The other two bars in the area, at On Broadway and Cindy Lou's BBQ in Champion, are smoke-free already.