



## Bold Initiatives Evident in Houston.

Engulfing exhibitors, retailers and other members in Houston this year was the concern with the proposed Federal tobacco excise tax increase. The RTDA increasingly addresses these issues as a course of its business, but a few initiatives on the show floor this year (in case you missed them) were of particular note.

Xikar launched the Defiance Cigar Group which offers cigar enthusiasts a premium cigar coupled with the ability to fight excessive legislation and taxation. Defiance Cigar Group will donate 5% of the wholesale price of each product to the Tobacco Retailer Action Committee in the state where the purchasing stores are located. If your state organization has not yet been formed, the funds will be managed until one is formed.

Also present at the show was the 'I Smoke, I Vote' drive undertaken by Nat Sherman on behalf of the industry. Their booth at the entrance to the trade show should have caught everyone's eye. Destroying apathy by doing all the hard work of contacting your state representatives for you, booth attendees personalized letters and faxed them to Senators. The response was huge and retailers were more than happy to be involved. A great initiative and one that was too easy!

Tony Tortorici, whose public relations firm of Tortorici & Randolph retained by your Association, was also on hand, helping man the RTDA booth where retail members could have a photo taken with the new IPCPR logo. These photos were forwarded to retailer's local newspapers with an accompanying press release detailing how taxation and

legislation hurts American family businesses. This localized action aimed to raise empathy among communities, demonstrating that tobacconists are upstanding members of the community who pay their taxes and play a strong role in their communities.

In addition to the Hometown Release Program, Tortorici & Randolph has been charged to develop an industry-specific retailer survey. This survey will provide essential data about the premium cigar and pipe industry and will be used to better educate your elected officials about who we are and what our industry represents.

Tortorici & Randolph will also assist IPCPR in its ultimate goal of gaining popular support among the non-smoking population that will in turn, lead to favorable support among elected politicians at all levels of government.

A few booths down from where Tony was located, the RTDA had set up a bank of desktop computers with direct internet connection to the Legislative Action Center, which could be used to contact your state's federal representatives. No longer are taxation and legislative issues solely the domain of the RTDA. Yes, the IPCPR is your industry body to help fight these introductions, however all members must be more active as individuals and as members of State Committees. These fantastic initiatives not only deserve further support, but our industry's strength as a whole may ultimately rest with these and similar projects.