



## **Rankin County Youth Prepare to Kick Butt**

On March 23, Mississippi youth in Rankin County will join kids in other counties and states to voice their opposition to big tobacco companies during 2011 Kick Butts Day.

Kick Butts Day is an annual nationwide initiative in which kids lead the effort to snuff out youth tobacco use. As part of this year's Kick Butts Day celebration, the Mississippi Tobacco-Free Coalition of Rankin, Scott and Simpson Counties is working with students at Reservoir YMCA, Brandon High School, Brandon Mayor's Youth Council, Pelahatchie High School, Florence High School, Pearl Upper Elementary, Flowood Elementary and Puckett Elementary to help them educate their peers about tobacco companies' deceptive marketing practices.

"The tobacco companies refer to kids as 'replacement smokers.' Kick Butts Day is an opportunity for participating youth to speak out and tell others they are not going to be influenced by pressure to use tobacco products," said Tawni Basden, Director of Mississippi Tobacco-Free Coalition of Rankin, Scott and Simpson Counties.

Tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of death in the United States, killing more than 400,000 people every year. Every day, more than 4,000 kids try their first cigarette, one-third of whom will die prematurely as a result. Each year, 4,200 Mississippi kids under the age of 18 become new, daily smokers. Sixty-nine thousand Mississippi kids now under 18 will ultimately die prematurely from smoking, according to the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids.

"Mississippi's kids play a huge role in helping to reduce youth tobacco use in our state," said Roy Hart, Director of the Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) Office of Tobacco Control. "The kids participating in Kick Butts Day 2011 are sending two very important messages: they want the tobacco industry to stop targeting them with advertising, and they want elected leaders to do more to protect them from tobacco."

Through MSDH's local tobacco-free coalitions, young advocates take part in a variety of tobacco prevention activities throughout the school year, including working with elected officials to develop policies that reduce youth tobacco use and exposure to secondhand smoke, and educating their peers about the risks of tobacco use.

The Mississippi Tobacco-Free Coalition of Rankin, Scott and Simpson Counties is a community-based coalition that works to prevent the initiation of tobacco use among youth, reduce exposure to secondhand smoke, promote tobacco cessation services, and eliminate tobacco-related disparities. This program is funded by the Mississippi State Department of Health.

For more information about Kick Butts Day events in Rankin, Scott or Simpson Counties or for tobacco cessation information, contact the Mississippi Tobacco-Free Coalition of Rankin, Scott and Simpson Counties at 601-933-9174 or visit [www.HealthyMS.com](http://www.HealthyMS.com).