



Gulledge to head anti-meth project

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By: The Associated Press

HELENA - Billings Gazette publisher Michael Gulledge has been appointed chairman of the Montana Meth Project as a capital campaign kicks off to continue its work, organization founder Tom Siebel said Thursday.

"It's an honor to serve as chairman of an organization that has developed such an effective and impactful program," Gulledge said of the project, which runs graphic ads about the perils of methamphetamine use.

"The strides the project has made to raise awareness and change attitudes towards meth illustrate the importance of what we're doing, and I look forward to ensuring this effort continues for many years to come," he said at a news conference at the Capitol.

The project also kicked off a capital campaign with a one-year, \$5 million challenge grant from the Thomas and Stacey Siebel Foundation.

The grant, which will match donations from private and corporate sources, will help fund the project's advertising campaign and expand its research and public outreach efforts.

Siebel said the organizers wanted to assure funding for the project through 2006 and then hand it over to the people of Montana.

"We're executing that plan," he said Thursday. "2007 is when the organization stands on its own."

Continuing the program is expected to cost roughly \$6 million a year, including \$2 million in state funding and \$2 million in federal funding annually, Siebel said.

Officials said the addition of public money is not expected to affect the graphic nature of the project's advertisements.

The project has not yet received funding commitments from either the federal or state government.

However, Gov. Brian Schweitzer's proposed two-year budget, announced Wednesday, contains \$1 million for meth-prevention programs such as the Montana Meth Project, Montana Attorney General Mike McGrath said, adding that organizers will continue working with Schweitzer and state lawmakers to secure funding for the project.

Gulledge urged Montanans to get involved in the future of the project by making a donation.

"The Siebel Foundation's challenge is the catalyst that will allow the Montana Meth Project to continue the work that we've started," he said. "With a gift of this magnitude, and the donations to match it, we can expand the reach of our campaign and ensure that Montana's young people will not become statistics in this deadly epidemic."

Officials are still working on a fundraising strategy but plan to run several campaigns in Montana's biggest cities, said Gary Burnett, development director for the Montana Meth Project.

"The biggest challenge is that people think it's going to take care of itself," Burnett said.

The Montana Meth Project is the state's largest advertiser, reaching 70 percent to 90 percent of Montana's teens at least three times a week.

Siebel said perceptions of meth have shifted across all age groups since the campaign began.

"Parents are now talking to their kids about the dangers of meth, and establishing that dialogue is a critical element to curbing use," he said.

Siebel dismissed criticism that the project's graphic ads are a "scare tactic" and exaggerate the effects of meth.

"The empirical data is clear. The young people of Montana find these ads to be credible," he said.

Siebel added that he is "not going away" and will continue his involvement in the Montana Meth Project as vice chairman and a member of the advisory council.

Gulledge has been with Lee Enterprises since 1983 and was promoted to vice president in 2005. He has been publisher of The Billings Gazette since 2000, and serves on several boards in Billings and throughout the state, including the Big Sky Economic Development Authority Board and the Billings Area Chamber of Commerce Board.