

Along the Robeson Trail

By Dr. Stan Knick, Director-UNCP Native American Resource Center

Lately the farmers who work the land around where I live have been bringing in their tobacco crop. Sometimes I find a fallen leaf or two along the road in front of my house, and it is difficult to resist the temptation to pick one up and smell it. It is a very historical smell.

No one doubts the long-standing importance of tobacco in eastern North Carolina's economy. "King Tobacco" has been mighty good to a lot of people. Anyone who has ever walked by a tobacco warehouse as I did when I was a child when the leaves are all laid out for sale will not soon forget that wonderful sweet golden smell. Virtually all of the "good" things one can say about tobacco are true. But the picture is not a simple one.

It is well known that tobacco was originally a Native American plant which Europeans and the rest of the world "discovered." However, most people don't know that the plants in question are actually two different species of tobacco (the traditional Indian plant was *Nicotiana rustica*; the modern hybrid crop is *Nicotiana tabacum*). Even fewer people know that both species are members of the Nightshade family (*Solanaceae*), which includes some other well-known plants such as the poisonous belladonna, and vegetables such as red peppers.

Lots of people know that many

Indian Nations use tobacco as a part of their ceremonies. In such a context, tobacco is literally a sacred plant — one use in a sacramental way. One Creek legend tells of the Tobacco Warrior who received the plant as a gift from the Creator. But the traditional ceremonial use of tobacco bears little resemblance to the habitual smoking seen in today's society. To many people, what was sacred has become profane.

Habitual tobacco smoking in a household has negative impacts on health in a number of ways. Here are some examples of the effects of tobacco smoking in the Robeson County Native American community:

1.) Indian children who live with a tobacco-smoking parent are **more than twice as likely** to have asthma than are Indian children who do not live with a smoker.

2.) Indian children who live with a tobacco-smoking parent are **more than twice as likely** to get pneumonia than are Indian children who do not live with a smoker.

3.) Indian families with a smoker in the house are **more than twice as likely** to have a family history of tuberculosis than are Indian families who do not live with a smoker.

4.) Indian families with a smoker in the house are **almost three times more likely** to have a family history of pneumonia than are Indian families

who do not live with a smoker.

5.) Indian families with a smoker in the house are **almost three times more likely** to have a family history of "other respiratory problems" (problems other than asthma, tuberculosis and pneumonia) than are Indian families who do not live with a smoker.

And perhaps most alarming, in view of these connections between tobacco smoking and poor health:

6.) In a sample group of more than 2,000 Robeson County Native American children, **63 percent live with at least one tobacco smoker at home!**

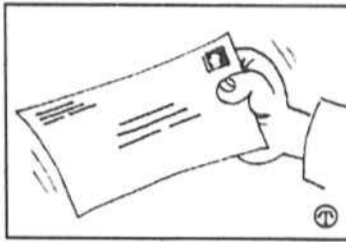
These things are not imaginary. They are not based on studies done somewhere else (although studies elsewhere show very similar results). These are the simple facts as they are occurring here and now along the Robeson Trail.

Yes, tobacco is an important economic factor in North Carolina. And yes, it has a place in tradition. But tobacco smoking in Native American families is hazardous to the health of more than just the smoker.

For more information, visit the Native American Resource Center in historic Old Main Building, on the campus of The University of North Carolina at Pembroke (our Internet address is www.uncp.edu/nativemuseum).

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A drink is a unit measuring the alcoholic content of beverages. In the U.S., a drink corresponds to about four ounces of wine or 1.25 ounces of whiskey.



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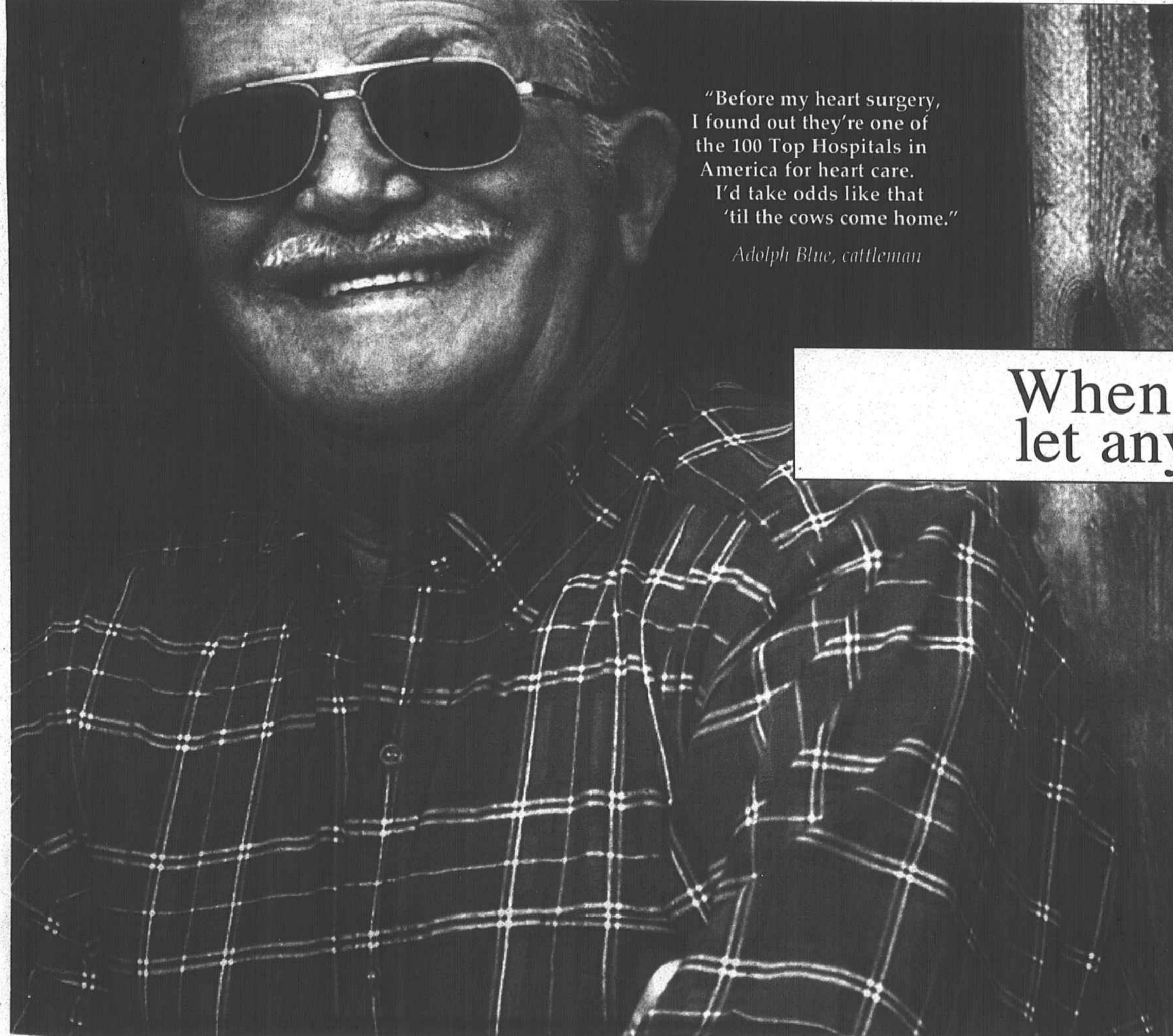
(NAPS)—If you are a black woman in the United States, you are three times more likely than a white woman to die from pregnancy-related complications and childbirth. To reduce these high mortality risks, the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine (SMFM) is emphasizing the importance of increased research efforts. The Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine is a not-for-profit organization of approximately 2,000 members dedicated to improving the health care of pregnant women and their infants.

A new book offers an alternative approach to treating a condition that threatens the vision of an increasing number of Baby Boomers. This condition, known as age related macular degeneration (ARMD), will affect up to 30 million Americans by the year 2010. Most people affected by ARMD are over 65, but certain



hereditary conditions may cause it to develop in younger individuals.

Until recently, people with ARMD had no alternative but to get used to living without their sight. In *Miracle Eye Cure* (North Atlantic Books, \$24.95) author Edward C. Kondrot, MD offers new hope for reversing eye disease with a procedure known as microcurrent stimulation. For additional information call 1-800-430-9328.



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