

## SIS Smoking Women,

ATLANTA (AP) During a recent "girls' night out" at a local restaurant, devout nonsmoker Melanie Davis surprised herself by smoking a cigar.

"It was a girlish thing to do in the ol' men's club, but it smelled wonderful and was so relaxing," says Davis, 35, a mother and restaurateur.

She's not puffing alone.

Following the lead of Jodie Foster and Whoopi Goldberg who wielded cigars after the Academy Awards women by the thousands are twirling A. Fuentes, sniffing H. Upmanns, savoring Dunhills and discovering cigars needn't be solely a masculine pleasure.

No hard numbers exist charting the trend: The industry estimates only one-tenth of 1 percent of the nation's 8 million cigar chompers are female, but that number is on the rise.

"I've seen an incredible increase in women smoking cigars," says Chops' owner, Pano Karatassos. So has Morton's of Chicago's manager Roger Turek, who notes, "More and more women are diving into the humidor and picking out a nice Davidoff."

In Los Angeles, women are joining cigar clubs such as the George Sand Smoker Society; in New York, women frequent cigar bars. Tobacco shops report more female customers, and Cigar Aficionado magazine plans a women-and-cigars story in June.

Women even have invaded the formerly all-male world of the black-tie "cigar smoker," a posh soiree of fine wines, dining and cigars.

Of the 152 guests who paid \$200 to attend a recently sold-out "International Cigar Celebration" at Atlanta's two Ritz-Carlton hotels, 21 are women. The hotel chain was hosting cigar parties in 31 cities around the world.

Women have smoked cigars since Christopher Columbus introduced them to Europe. Catherine the Great smoked cigars, as did Golda Meir and Virginia Woolf. In fact, cigar bands were created so women's gloves would stay clean while they puffed a stogie.

But health reasons and the vicissitudes of public opinion put an end to most of that until recently.

Today, with Arnold Schwarzenegger and Rush Limbaugh leading the way, cigar smoking is again acceptable, and not just for men.

Women list myriad reasons why they like smoking cigars. Former cigarette smokers say they've traded a two-pack-a-day habit for a single, after-dinner Dominican. Others say cigar smoking brings back fond memories since as children they watched favorite male relatives smoke cigars.

Still others like being cigar buddies with their husbands.

"I used to wonder why my husband would drive from Douglasville to Atlanta and the Royal Cigar Co.," says Dorothy Armstrong, 39. "One day I joined him and that's how I started. Smoking cigars gives us something to do together."

Many women like the sensuality of cigar smoking and how it stimulates the senses of touch, smell, sight and taste.

"You move smoking a cigar. You hold it. You waft it under your nose. You look at it. With a cigarette you're either holding it or