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A Toast For The Kids At A Grad Party? Think Again

The city's social host law makes it illegal to serve alcohol to minors in your home

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High school graduation marks the end of an era; generally, this milestone is seen as a passage from childhood into adulthood, a celebratory time when more freedom is granted, rules are bent and roles are shifting.

With graduation comes the numerous graduation parties, and some parents may allow the new graduates to indulge in an alcoholic beverage or two, convincing themselves that it's okay to allow their teens to drink as long as they are under their own roof. While parents may think this is a reasonable and responsible action to take, it is still against the law.

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on their property."**

- Sgt. Pat Hall

In 2006, Glen Cove became the first municipality in Nassau County to successfully draft and implement a Social Host Law. This sweeping legislation makes it a violation if any person under the age of 21 consumes alcohol in your household. Since its implementation, this law has been utilized approximately 21 times, allowing local law enforcement to take affirmative actions in these cases.

Glen Cove City Councilman Tony Jimenez, chair of the SAFE Pride Coalition Community Committee for the third year, spoke to the *Record Pilot* and says this committee was responsible for passing the law, and that the

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main push is to educate parents and children before needing to enforce it. “We want to get the word out first, we don’t want to make criminals out of people,” he stressed.

He says their efforts have been successful in that there have been several violators who have been cited, and that gets the word out that the law “has some teeth to it.” He added, “Hopefully we can save some lives with it.”

The committee’s role is to spread the word about the dangers of underage drinking and make the community aware that the law exists, and that there are consequences. They get the message across through billboards, print and by setting up booths at various events throughout the year, talking to families and getting them to take an “oath” to not serve alcohol to minors in the home.

In 2010, the coalition unveiled a new campaign called “Parents Who Host Lose The Most” to highlight the law. The campaign provided educational workshops for parents outlining the new law and numerous materials were distributed including flyers, stickers and posters distributed throughout the city and school district.

SAFE Executive Director Dr. Sharon Harris notes that prior to the law’s enactment, Glen Cove had numerous problems with minors being served at bars, sold to at liquor stores and drinking at parties, and something had to be done. She says Georgie Connett, board chair of the SAFE executive committee, was instrumental in the strategic planning of the social host law and pulling the plan together, and the policing and enforcement has been enhanced since implementation of the law.

“The law sets a ‘no tolerance’ tone,” says Harris. “Children and their parents will be held accountable for their actions. It is illegal for kids to drink, and illegal to host a party where minors are drinking.”

Harris credits the city for making the plan work, stating that she never felt she needed to sell the concept to the “powers that be.”

“We had marvelous support from the city government and the police department in putting the mechanism in place.”

Last year, SAFE and the coalition partnered with the

Glen Cove Police Department to create an anonymous social host hotline (516-320-7944), which can be found on the SAFE website, www.safeglen Cove.org.

Sergeant Pat Hall of the Glen Cove Police Department says they routinely send out officers – either in plainclothes or in uniform, depending on the situation – to monitor house parties after receiving anonymous tips or calls from neighbors. If they notice anything, they knock on the door. He says most of the time, no parents are home, but if they are, they receive a summons to the Glen Cove City Court.

He says it used to be a misdemeanor for a first time of-

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executive director of SAFE, Inc.**

fense, but now it is a city ordinance violation. Parents have to show up in court and the judge either slaps them with a fine or charges them with community service, so there are no “blemishes” on the record.

Sometimes, however, the situation does warrant an “endangerment to the welfare of a child” charge, Hall says.

“We’re not out to screw up peoples’ lives,” Hall explained. “We’re just trying to prevent them from screwing up other peoples’ lives.”

For the past six years, Hall has been working with SAFE on enforcing the law.

Hall pointed out that adults may remember that they “did the same thing” when they were younger or may assume that kids will find a way to get alcohol, and might think it’s better to let them drink where they can monitor it.

The problem arises when kids who may have been drinking in a private home then take the wheel and become a public safety risk.

“The problem with Glen Cove is, we all grew up here, we know the kids, we know the parents, and we still have to give a summons,” says Hall. “It makes it tougher, but, it is what it is.”

The police department also has their sights set on preventing the sale of alcohol to minors. Several years ago they began targeting the 25 or so liquor establishments around town to see whether they would sell to a minor. Hall says they recruit an underage volunteer to accompany a team of four plainclothes officers to try and purchase alcohol.

“A lot of places did sell at first, but we’re at 100 percent compliance now,” says Hall, adding that there are occasional slip-ups. He says on the first night, seven or eight places out of the 24 visited sold to the minor – and were consequently slapped with a hefty fine.

Hall stresses that he and his team are honest in how they operate, and are not out to deceive the businesses.

“No fake IDs are used, they are told not to lie about their age,” Hall says. He says if they are asked for ID, they simply must hand their own license to the vendor.

“If they screw up, we write a summons and report them to the state liquor authority,” Hall says, adding that he generally gives the businesses warning that they will be dropping in like this once a month. “They must obey, or they will be put out of business.”

Hall says the fines go up quickly with each additional offense: a first fine can cost a business \$500, a second \$1,000, and a third \$2,000.

To date, Hall says the Aqua Lounge is the only establishment that has been put out of business due to this method of patrolling. He says there was a lot of underage drinking going on and they had to revoke their liquor license.

Hall says the tip line starts to get active during the summer months. A number of the parties they hear about are out of hand, and sometimes the first tip they get is when a kid passes out and ends up in the hospital.

“It’s amazing how many times parents allow this to happen,” says Hall. “They are not above the law to allow other peoples’ underage kids to drink on their property.”