

Group fights illegal drinking Event takes on domestic ills

BY LINDSEY LISTROM
STAFF WRITER

In North Carolina, Alcohol Law Enforcement agents work with police officers to combat underage drinking, but some citizens think an even stronger stand is needed.

A coalition called the Committee for Alcohol- and Drug-Free Teenagers — composed of parents, law enforcement agents and school officials — is trying to ensure that all possible efforts are made to curb illegal drinking and drug use.

The committee formed in May when Dale Pratt-Wilson, a Chapel Hill mother of two, heard about an apartment party with four kids hosted by an 11th grader.

She said her son and daughters had been telling her for years that "everyone" drinks. She went to the party to see what they meant.

She arrived about one minute after the police, who had been called in to break up a fight, and saw about 200 minors fleeing the scene, leaving empty cups and the scent of marijuana.

"It was really disturbing," Pratt-

Wilson said.

She decided to bring her concerns to the public. She sent out letters to everyone she could think of — police departments, town governments and mayors, principals, parents and the press.

Soon after, Pratt-Wilson and others established the committee.

The committee has held two meetings, one in Chapel Hill and one in Carrboro, each attended by town officials, parents, police and ALE agents, among others.

"My vision is to form a permanent organization, a watchdog group," she said. "Someone to hold police and high schools accountable ... and get stronger law enforcement for both kids and those who are aiding and abetting."

An ongoing issue

Pratt-Wilson said the committee formed during a time when underage use of substances is rising.

In a survey of 134 high school students by Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools, 44 percent of those

surveyed said they had bought, sold or been offered drugs on campus.

Stephanie Willis, health coordinator for city schools, said school officials aren't certain the figure is accurate. "But it gives us an indication there is a problem," she said.

Gregg Jarvis, Chapel Hill police chief, said he had not noticed an increase in alcohol use by minors.

"It's not a greater problem now than five or 10 years ago, but the awareness has increased," he said.

He added that underage drinking is more of a family issue.

But Jarvis, who attended the forums, said the police have taken steps to curtail underage drinking.

Efforts include retraining officers to be consistent in arrests, more strictly enforcing underage drinking policies and checking records on repeat offenders.

College town culture

In Chapel Hill, the return of college students every year is associated with a rise in illegal behavior.

"Being a college town, you are going to have more underage drinking," said Kyle Barbee, ALE agent for Chatham and Orange counties.

To combat underage drinking among college students in Chapel Hill, two ALE officers are assigned to the county. On occasions in which they expect an increase in underage drinking, they run special operations.

For their annual back-to-school operation this year from Aug. 26 to Aug. 27, agents made 30 arrests

with a total of 43 charges.

In Raleigh, home of N.C. State University, ALE agents ran a similar operation from Aug. 19 to Aug. 20.

That weekend, 135 people were arrested for underage alcohol-related offenses, said Jeff Lasater, supervisor of ALE District 4, which includes Orange County.

Charges in Raleigh for those two nights totaled 158 — 110 of which were for underage possession.

Lasater said ALE agents received tips about parties in apartments and fraternities, which led to more arrests there than in Chapel Hill. The same number of agents worked in both locations.

Although the ALE specializes in enforcing alcohol laws, area police also take the laws seriously.

Both police departments and the ALE run compliance checks in stores that sell alcohol. On the weekend of Oct. 2, Chapel Hill police cited five of 14 stores for selling alcohol to a minor.

In a similar operation in Raleigh, conducted by the ALE in August, only two of 27 stores sold.

Pratt-Wilson said she thinks combating underage drinking is especially important in Chapel Hill because minors make up a considerable proportion of the population.

And while her group focuses on stopping illegality among the high school population, Pratt-Wilson said she has bigger plans. "We're going to take on college next."

Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.

Officials focus on raising awareness

BY TED STRONG
STAFF WRITER

In the warm breeze and strained light of a weekend dinner hour, as a child dangled joyously from the fork of a tree and four young men at a picnic table sipped wine, a bluegrass band picked a tune.

Such was the atmosphere at Carrboro's Weaver Street Market on Saturday, the setting for a fund-raiser aimed at increasing awareness of rape and domestic abuse.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and Saturday's effort was part of a monthlong calendar of events geared toward the cause.

Margaret Barrett, director of the Orange County Rape Crisis Center, said that while she hoped to raise some funds Saturday, the real focus of the event was increased awareness.

"It's important to have events like this one. ... Rape and domestic violence are taboo topics," said Shauna Hay, secretary of the board of directors for the rape crisis center.

"The issues tend to be hidden for some people," Barrett said.

To combat that, the rape crisis center and the prevention center manned a table from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. as a bluegrass band played tunes and a hula-hoop artist performed with a flaming hoop.

The table, which was located in the outdoor eating area in front of the market, was draped with a purple cloth and featured fliers, purple ribbons, stickers, nail files and a collection basket for contributions.

Purple was prevalent at the event because it is the color of domestic violence awareness.

Melissa Radcliff, community

service coordinator of the Family Violence Prevention Center of Orange County, said people shouldn't limit their awareness of domestic abuse to October.

"Domestic violence awareness takes place yearround," she said. "Folks want to think it doesn't exist."

Radcliff said the purpose of the event was threefold: The event raised community awareness of the violence problem, let victims know they can get help and reminded them they are not alone.

The Chapel Hill-Carrboro community typically is positive toward steps taken to prevent rape and domestic violence, but Hay said both groups hoped to further raise awareness in the area.

"At something like this, you may not have a crowd of people stopping by to pick up stuff," Radcliff said. "It's low-key."

She said the hope was that simply by having a table in a busy place, such as in front of the market, the groups would be seen by many people.

Even if people don't stop to pick up literature, give money or sign up for mailings, they will become more aware of the centers, she added.

Both groups said they were happy they were able to hold the event at the market.

"I think it's great. It's a very laid-back atmosphere," Hay said.

Both the band, the Tim Stambaugh Band, and the hula hoop artist, Julia Hartsell, volunteered their performances.

"I'm part of the community. I want to do good things for the community when I can," said Stambaugh, the band's leader.

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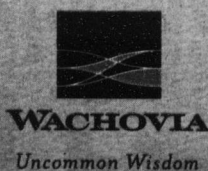
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