

LOCAL

Liquor-by-the-drink rumors stir up KM citizens

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Rumors have flown through town about a possible upcoming liquor by the drink referendum for the City of Kings Mountain. Although it has been discussed among citizens and city council members lately, whether or not a referendum will come up lies in the hands of the populace.

A group of individuals, with economic development in mind, have questioned city council members about the possibility of getting a referendum for liquor by the drink. But most of the councilmen have shied away from "leaving their fingerprints on this train wreck," telling the citizens that if they want the referendum they should petition for it.

"I think that's the best route, just to petition for one," said Mayor Pro-Tem Rodney Gordon.

"Let the people decide," said Councilman Rick Moore, who just returned from vacation. "I don't have a dog in this fight."

"If they want it they should

do the petition," said Councilman Dean Spears. "I don't think council should be involved."

Gordon added that if supporters can't collect enough signatures on a petition to hold a referendum, then the issue probably wouldn't pass at the referendum phase anyway.

Cleveland County Board of Elections Director Debra Blanton said that in order to petition for a referendum, such as liquor by the drink, petitioners would need to collect signatures from at least 35 percent of the registered voters. She said that from the most recent data collected in October, there are 6,007 registered voters in Kings Mountain. Petitioners would need at least 2,102 signatures to call for a referendum.

Once enough names are collected on the petition, Blanton said that the Board of Elections would have about 30 days to determine the petition's sufficiency and then would schedule the election no sooner than 60 days nor later than 120 days from the date the petition was

verified by the board. Although some thought they would have a better chance getting it on the November ballot with the presidential election, Blanton said that NC General Statute states: "No alcoholic beverage election may be held on the Tuesday next after the first Monday in November of an even-numbered year (NCGS 18B-601f)."

Gregg Johnson, who is familiar with the current interest in a liquor by the drink referendum, said that he doesn't think it has reached the point of petition just yet.

Liquor by the drink talks came up at Mountaineer Partnership's downtown revitalization meetings. Several business owners have been in favor of the issue, not necessarily for the alcohol but for the high-scale restaurants and further economic development the city could attract.

Johnson, who sees both sides of the issue as a businessman and a Christian, said that a lot of people who want to eat at an Applebee's or an Outback Steakhouse are driving to

Shelby and Gastonia. Liquor-by-the-drink supporters say that they could tap into that customer-base and possibly attract even more because of the city's access to I-85 and Hwy. 74. Supporters argue that the current ban on full-bar restaurants prohibits these establishments from settling in KM.

"I wonder if that's the only thing holding back a chain like that coming to Kings Mountain," said Pastor Jeff Hensley, of KM Baptist Church.

Those against liquor by the drink are concerned of its additional availability and visibility in the city. "They think of the dangers that come with people who don't manage it well," Hensley said. He added that many also fear the dangers that may come from people having more and more access to the liquor.

"Clearly, there is evidence in the scripture that people drank. Biblically, speaking, alcohol is there, but the Bible's stance on it is to not drink to excess," he said.

Another lesson in the Bible,

taught by the Apostle Paul, explains that "if your neighbor would stumble because of your doing it, then don't do it," Hensley paraphrased. "I'm not convinced that liquor by the drink is the only thing standing in the way of our growing."

The issue of liquor by the drink has arisen before. Could it really bring progress? Could it really stain the moral fabric of Kings Mountain?

"What I'm telling the people is I want to see facts," Gordon said. "Everybody says it's going to stimulate the economy in Kings Mountain. Show me the facts. People for it say it will help and people against it say it won't help. Present the facts as you present your case."

Gordon says that without the facts, he is torn on the issue. He has heard from and is supported by people on both sides. He can see the possibility from an economic standpoint, but is also affected by the morality factor. "I represent the people but I also have my morals and ethics that I have to stand behind," he said.

NEWS BRIEFS

Jones joins Navy on Delayed Entry Program

Christopher N. Jones has joined the United States Army under the Delayed Entry Program. The program gives young men and women the opportunity to delay entering active duty for up to one year.

The enlistment gives the new soldier the option to learn a new skill, travel and become eligible to receive as much as \$50,000 toward a college education. After completion of basic military training, soldiers receive advanced individual training in their career job specialty prior to being assigned to their first permanent duty station.

The recruit, a prior-service member, enlisted for four years and qualified for a \$25,000 enlistment bonus. He reported for Advance Individual Training at Fort Gordon, Augusta, Ga., in February.

He is the son of Maria U. and Anthony M. Jones of Hardin Circle, Grover.

Miracle Amusements buys Town & Country

Miracle Amusements recently purchased Town & Country Catering, 115 Park Grace Road, Kings Mountain.

The new family dining room area seats 200 and is open each Sunday from 11 a.m.-2:30 p.m. for buffet lunch.

For more information call 704-507-3883.

Easter bunny to visit kids at Cleveland Mall

The Easter bunny will arrive at Cleveland Mall March 8 at 2 p.m. to kick off the spring season.

Children can join in several fun activities surrounding the event. Free games with prizes will be sponsored by Falls Insurance. Students from Step-n-Out Dance Productions will perform at 2:15.

The bunny will be available for visits and pictures at center court.

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