

A Cry for Help

Underage Drinking on the Blue Hill Peninsula

Be part of a healthy community! Bring your thoughts and ideas on ways to reduce underage drinking to "A Cry for Help," a community forum presented by Peninsula Area Team for Health.

Tuesday, November 29, 7 p.m.

Esther Wood Lecture Room,
George Stevens Academy

The forum will feature a panel of community leaders:
John Bannister, owner of Merrill & Hinckley
and a Blue Hill selectman

Jody Douglass, Head of School, George Stevens Academy

Arnold Greenberg, Director, Liberty School

Mark Hurvitt, Superintendent, School Union 93

Scott Kane, Hancock County Sheriff's Deputy

Moderator Ron Beard from the

University of Maine Cooperative Extension

According to surveys, almost 30 percent of teens on the Blue Hill Peninsula report that they drink alcohol. Alcohol consumption by minors is a major factor in sexual assault, suicide, homicide and accidents. Limiting access is part of an effective strategy to reduce the underage drinking problem.



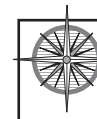
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A Cry for Help

Community challenge to reduce underage drinking

By LINDA ROBINSON
JAFFE
COORDINATOR,
PENINSULA AREA
TEAM FOR HEALTH

Peninsula Area Team for Health is a coalition of volunteers representing families, schools and community, dedicated to preventing substance abuse and violence and promoting healthy choices.

Over the past decade, PATH has focused on individual skill-building to prevent substance abuse, with programs promoting family bonding, smoother transition from middle school to high school and conflict resolution skills.

The current members of the Board of Directors include Ralph Chapman, president; Sandy Phoenix, secretary; Jan Carpenter, treasurer; Jill Eckert, Steve Harris and Jim Schatz. PATH has a part-time coordinator, Linda Jaffe, and an outreach consultant, Denise Black. Another part-time employee, Gordanna Hassett, works with George Stevens Academy on the Social Norms Marketing Program.

The Maine Office of Substance Abuse conducts a biannual survey of middle and high school students. The 2004 Maine Youth Drug and Alcohol Survey indicates that alcohol ranks *first* (26.9 percent) as the drug

of choice for students in Hancock County—almost double the next category, cigarettes (14.6 percent).

Analysis of 2002 data indicates that of the 17 counties in Maine, Hancock ranked:

- 12th in the lifetime use of alcohol, with 54.5 percent of students indicating that they had consumed alcohol at some time;
- sixth in the use of alcohol over the past 30 days, with 31.3 percent of students reporting that they had drunk alcohol in the past month.

Equally significant, Hancock County scored as one of the three lowest Maine counties in several protective factors—things that keep kids away from alcohol:

- social skills;
- belief in the moral order;
- family attachment.

The Office of Substance Abuse has mandated a statewide 10 percent decrease in underage drinking, to be evidenced by the results of the survey to be administered in February 2006. PATH is working with our community to respond to this mandate by implementing a program called Communities Mobilizing for Change in Alcohol.

CMCA is a community organizing effort designed to change policies and practices

of major community institutions in ways that reduce access to alcohol by teenagers. It was developed and evaluated in a 15-community randomized trial by the Alcohol Epidemiology Program at the University of Minnesota School of Public Health.

The intervention approach involves activating the citizenry of communities to achieve changes in local public policies and changes in the practices of major community institutions, such as law enforcement, licensing departments, community events, civic groups, churches and synagogues, schools and local mass media.

The objective is to reduce the flow of alcohol to youth from illegal sales by retail establishments, and from provision of alcohol to youth by other adults in the community.

Effectively limiting the accessibility of alcohol to teens not only directly reduces teen drinking, but also communicates a clear social norm in the community that underage drinking is inappropriate and unacceptable. Changing the social and policy environment in communities is essential for long-term prevention success.

The core of the CMCA program is community organizing. PATH initiated a number of efforts to raise awareness of

underage drinking, including sticker shock and server training programs conducted on site at area retailers to educate customers and staff members about laws governing the sale of alcohol to minors.

Currently PATH is working with Union 93 administrators to update all school policies regarding smoking and drinking on school property. It is expected that these policies will be revised to allow PATH to install signs at all schools, indicating that no drinking or smoking is allowed—a major step for a community.

An additional component of PATH's efforts has been the inclusion of a Social Norms Marketing Program at George Stevens Academy. Social norms marketing is predicated on the idea that perceptions are frequently exaggerated and do not truly reflect behavior—in this instance the perception being addressed is that "all kids drink." The truth is that they don't.

Through survey and analysis, statements of fact regarding behaviors are developed. These "factoids" are distributed and discussed. To get the word out to students, GSA prepared a four-color poster that has been distributed throughout the school. The Information Technology classes are incorporating the messages as screen savers

on the school's computers. A photography class is creating images that will graphically depict the messages. Curriculum infusion workshops were conducted with the faculty, giving them information that can be incorporated into lesson plans.

The students will be surveyed a second time, after the marketing program efforts, to measure adjustments. This technique has proven effective in combating misconceptions in a number of situations. It is our hope that distributing accurate information will help students make informed and healthy choices.

Organizing for social change requires the input and support of all levels of community. Inviting Blue Hill Peninsula residents to come together to dialogue with leaders will identify challenges, acknowledge the work already being done, and help PATH develop strategies and programs to support other community efforts. The forum will give residents the opportunity to share information and concerns.

Healthy communities benefit everyone and enhance the quality of life for all residents. Working together the residents of the Blue Hill Peninsula can provide a safe, nurturing environment for our children.

Make healthy decisions about alcohol use

By **JODY DOUGLASS**
HEAD OF SCHOOL,
GEORGE STEVENS
ACADEMY

As I walked through the cafeteria at break one day recently, a senior boy stopped me.

“Read this, Ms. Douglass,” he said, “and tell me why I can’t put this on my yearbook page.”

Before me was a poem entitled “Be Drunk” by Charles Baudelaire: “It is time to be drunk! So as not to be the martyred slaves of time, be drunk, be continually drunk! On wine, on poetry or on virtue as you wish.” The message is not about drinking, the student challenged. It is about experiencing life.

So, once again as a responsible adult, I struggled to find a way to talk easily about the poem and its appropriateness for a yearbook page. As we talked, eight to 10 students gathered and I asked them how we could make better sense of the issues surrounding underage drinking.

“I don’t drink much,” said one student. “I don’t really like to be drunk.”

Another nearly shouted: “Give us something to do! It is pretty pathetic if we have to hang out in a parking lot for fun.”

Another said, “I don’t know

what you should write about; I don’t drink.” Another suggested we change the drinking age to 18 and the driving age to 21 because driving was where the real problems happened.

All day I asked students for their thoughts about drinking. One student talked about advertising: “Watch any TV show, especially football games, and watch the messages they are sending.” I agreed and suggested the ads were not pitching

Perceptions of drinking and drug use are exaggerated and tend to make us believe that “everyone” drinks or participates in other unhealthy behavior.

alcohol to me. They laughed out loud and agreed that the alcohol ads were being pitched to young people—not 50-year-olds!

“The drugs they pitch to your age group are sleeping pills and Viagra,” said one boy.

Finally one student said, “We know you will just write that drinking is bad.”

No, I give them same message every time. Drinking is not bad, but I know for sure

that the longer you wait to start, the older you are when you make the decision about drinking, the better the chances will be that you will handle alcohol responsibly.

When you are an adolescent, you are meant to experience a wide range of feelings and explore them. Drinking will minimize that exploration. It may feel like having a drink heightens the experience, but the reality is that it changes your chemistry. You need to learn about yourself during these years and let your body and mind grow. Using alcohol or drugs will change the experience. I don’t know any adults who are glad they started drinking when they were in high school.

Our American culture demands that we make a decision about consuming alcohol. Many people drink, and social drinking can play a huge part in adult lives. It is important to acknowledge these elements when talking with young people—and to say that drinking is not necessarily bad.

People in other cultures approach the use of alcohol differently. There is no age at which buying and consuming alcohol becomes legal. Children grow up in settings where a glass of alcohol for young and old is a part of most large cele-

brations or family gatherings. Problem use of alcohol does exist in other cultures, too, but often takes a different form. In the U.S., the drinking that occurs among young people is illicit, hidden, and illegal; and for some the fact that it is prohibited makes it even more appealing.

Last year, Peninsula Area Team for Health helped George Stevens Academy fund a study of alcohol use among our students as part of a Social Norms Model of Prevention. The theory behind this program is that perceptions of drinking and drug use are exaggerated and tend to make us believe that

Our young people...need us to tell them the truth and hold them responsible for their behavior.

“everyone” drinks or participates in other unhealthy behavior. Collecting and presenting data of actual use can correct these perceptions and help students make better decisions. We intend to continue this program so that we have year-to-year comparisons and can talk honestly about our school community.

Recently GSA had a discipline situation involving athletes and drinking. Good students made a poor choice and ended up with suspensions for two athletic contests in the post-season tournament. Along with the resulting disappointment and unhappiness comes an important learning opportunity. Incidents like this one highlight how personal choices can have consequences that impact the whole community.

Our young people face all the same challenges of young people everywhere. They are active, involved and busy. They also face the lure of drug and alcohol use and they need the adults here—their parents, the school, and the community—to be clear and thoughtful. They need us to tell them the truth and hold them responsible for their behavior.

Our responsibility is to pay attention, to make good choices ourselves, and to be honest about the difficulty we confront in making our own healthy decisions every day. The fact that we are discussing these issues community-wide lets our young people know that we care about them and about the choices they make. There are no easy answers to this age-old issue, but working together we can make a difference.

Why are we surprised so many young people drink?

By **ARNOLD GREENBERG**
DIRECTOR, LIBERTY
SCHOOL

Underage drinking is a major concern in most communities. Alcohol is the number one drug problem in the country and kills more young people than marijuana, cocaine, heroin and every other illegal drug combined. More youth drink alcohol than use tobacco. More than 90 per-

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cent of high school seniors have reported that alcohol is “very easy to get.” High school students who use alcohol and other substances are five times more likely to drop out or believe that earning good grades is not important.

According to a study in 2003, 44 percent of young people who drink were described as non-drinkers by their parents, and 27 percent of students who described themselves as binge drinkers were described by their parents as non-drinkers.

These facts are not surprising because the most significant fact is that we live in an addicted society. Addictions to drinking, smoking, gambling, shop-

ping, junk food and gas guzzling cars are rampant.

The culture our young people experience every day gives double messages. We say “don’t drink or do drugs,” but they see drinking and smoking all around them and usually in “attractive” ways. Rarely is there not a movie where as soon as a person comes into a room, he or she pours a drink. Youth see slick executives’ offices with bars. They see cool guys come into an apartment and go to the refrigerator and take out a beer. They see their favorite actors and actresses with cigarettes dangling from their lips. Young people are influenced by what people do, not what they say. Why are we so surprised that so many young people drink?

Addictions are usually symptoms of other problems. Boredom is an epidemic. Many people are not satisfied by their

engaged lives—that is, they listen to music rather than play it. More people watch sports than play sports.

The culture our young people experience every day gives double messages.

It’s hard to pinpoint why this is, but I think a lot of it is related to education. For most people, school was and still is something to be endured. Most of what is presented to students in the name of education is irrelevant and does not inspire passion to pursue one’s interest. Some people do find what they love, but sadly, the majority do not.

A profound book I read recently, *In Search of Human Nature* by Mary Clarke, emphasized the point that there are

Unless communities are willing to invest time and money in providing alternatives to drinking, nothing will change.

jobs, feel their lives are empty of meaning, and tend to fill that void with anything that will make them feel better. Many people live passive rather than

certain “propensities” all people need. They are: autonomy, bonding, and meaning. Autonomy is a sense of freedom, of

independence, a feeling that one’s individuality is respected and valued. Bonding is a sense of belonging, of feeling part of a family, a group or community. Meaning is a sense of purpose—a feeling that one’s life is serving some greater good. Thoreau said, “The mass of men live lives of quiet desperation.” If it is true that many people are not fulfilled by how they are living, then it follows, that some form of escape from that pain is inevitable. Often alcohol or some other drug is used to numb the pain.

There is no question that underage drinking is an extremely disturbing problem

that too many times leads to tragedy—25 percent of 15- to 20-year-old drivers killed in driving accidents had been drinking. Underage drinking, like other addictions, will continue to be a problem unless satisfying alternatives are found. Unless communities are willing to invest time and money in providing alternatives to drinking—such as a wide variety of educational, social and recreational programs for evenings and weekends where the young people feel part of the creating of these programs—nothing will change. The cost of not providing these programs is much more expensive.

The potential for tragic headlines

By **MARK HURVITT**
SUPERINTENDENT OF
SCHOOLS, UNION 93

Underage drinking is a problem nationally and it’s a problem in Maine. However, when I think of the Blue Hill Peninsula, to me underage drinking really means drinking and driving since each town is so spread out and since so many high school students have access to cars. I always am relieved when New Year’s Eve, prom night, and

graduation night come and go without a tragic headline about drinking and driving in the next morning’s newspaper. Yet, with underage drinking and driving, any day or night could turn into a tragic headline.

I think it is timely that PATH is highlighting this issue, and I hope that this effort will help to curtail, and ultimately eliminate, underage drinking on the Blue Hill peninsula.

Teenage drinking—whose problem is it anyway?

By JOHN BANNISTER
OWNER, MERRILL &
HINCKLEY and
BLUE HILL SELECTMAN

Several weeks ago I was asked to write an article on teenage drinking from the perspective of a businessman, a community leader and a parent. Many thoughts went through my mind as I deliberated over what to write. Political correctness dictates that I not speak ill of any one or any group of people. Yet over the years it has become painfully obvious that many uninformed people choose to blame the merchants who sell alcohol for our epidemic of teenage drinking.

As one of those merchants I wish to categorically state that is not the case.

Many uninformed people choose to blame the merchants who sell alcohol for our epidemic of teenage drinking.

Those of us who have flown on an airline in the last three years have had to comply with new stringent rules and regulations regarding air travel. We have had nail clippers confiscated and been asked to remove our shoes (how about that job) for inspection. Yet most of us have submitted to the extreme and even ridiculous policies with fairly good humor.

On my last airline trip I was pulled out of line at the airport eight times down and back. I was sure my travel companions had paid off the airline checkers. Turns out I just fit the profile of a terrorist. My oversized duffle bag made them nervous. I remained in good humor and complied with no regrets. We all have because we recognize it must be done to ensure our safety. It appears we are all in this together.

Now compare the level of cooperation and compliance with what we see regarding teenage drinking. How many of you have snapped at or ridiculed a clerk who was faithfully trying to implement the state liquor or cigarette laws? Why is it the same good humor and cooperation isn't forthcoming with alcohol and cigarette sales as it is with airline travel?

The clerks have been instructed by state training personnel and their employers: "No ID—no sale." In this day and age who doesn't have ID on them when going to the store to buy alcohol or cigs? What planet are they from? Is it really that big of an imposition to have your license in your hand when you

purchase these items? Are you really that shocked that you were asked for ID that you have to run up one side and down the other of any clerk doing his or her job the way it is mandated by law? Do you think the purpose of asking for ID is to inconvenience you—or is it, perhaps, part of a larger plan to reduce teenage drinking?

How can we ever hope to curtail teenage drinking if we can't even pull together when it comes to jumping through the "hoops" designed to curtail sales to minors?

Did you know that a clerk can be fined \$500 for selling to a minor? Did you know a clerk can be fined \$500 for being fooled by a forged ID? That's right, the clerk is expected to determine if the ID is real or a "professional/from the Internet" forgery.

The state, in its infinite wisdom, has determined that the clerk doing the selling and the business owner who hired that clerk are to blame for our alcohol problems. Is there any wonder that most clerks are reluctant to complete a sale of cigs or alcohol without proper ID and supporting ID even if you look 40 to some people? Further, in addition to fining the clerk who sells to someone with a phony ID, the state fines the store a matching or higher fine because it's the employer's fault for hiring someone who broke the law!

Do you realize that after you have given a clerk a bad time over an ID check you may possibly have caused her to be less vigilant on the next sale to someone who looks old enough, but might be a 20-year-old who looks 30.

No one in the retail business enjoys being verbally beaten up by irate customers.

Isn't it strange that if a 20-

Clerks have been instructed by state training personnel and their employers: "No ID—no sale."

year-old attempts to purchase alcohol with a forged ID there is no risk to them. If the clerk makes the sale—\$500 fine! The minor suffers no penalty if caught attempting to buy.

Imagine if there was no crime in attempting to rob a store; it's only a crime if you succeed. In fact, in most instances where minors were caught with alcohol in their

possession, they were told if they identified the store where they bought the alcohol their possession charges would be dropped.

Let me see...if I point my finger at any business that sells alcohol, I get off scot-free? That's a no-brainer.

If the business denies selling to the minor and it is the store's word against that of the under-

If we are serious about no alcohol for teenagers, how about a law for minors: "You lose your driver's license until you are 25 if you get caught buying or attempting to buy, or possessing alcohol."

age drinker, the courts side with the youthful offender. After all why would they lie?

I'm sure the majority of the alcohol consumed by teenagers is purchased legally by someone of proper age. Teenagers



either "borrow" it from their parents' stash or get someone old enough to buy it for them.

Clerks breaking the law is a very small part of the overall problem. If we are serious about no alcohol for teenagers, how about a law for minors: "You lose your driver's license until you are 25 if you get caught buying or attempting to buy, or possessing alcohol!" The potential loss of a driver's license is a huge incentive to not "try" to see if you can buy or consume alcohol.

Herein lies a problem we, as a society, face. We do not believe in personal responsibility. It always has to be someone else's fault. We couldn't possibly blame underage youths for their own drinking habits and hold them responsible—not when we can blame someone else. It must be the persons responsible for providing the alcohol, whether legal or otherwise. After all, the logic goes like this: if these folks hadn't made this alcohol available, then these misguided youths would never have been drinking. What poppycock!

The problem is all of us as a group, as a society, as parents. We cannot decide unanimously

if we think underage drinking is a bad thing and if we should all band together to stop it. We don't send consistent signals that teenage drinking is bad.

How many schools have come up with policies on alcohol and drugs based on the zero tolerance principle? Most of them, I think. The problem is that in their attempt to pursue a solution to underage drinking

tolerance solution they end up driving many of the parents into the "school has no business worrying about non-school activities" camp. This of course sends the message to kids that the whole alcohol issue must be overblown because their parents are helping to attack the school policies regarding alcohol. In this instance if the punishment wasn't so extreme and distasteful to the parents then they could become part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

Community service or extra school work (reports on the dangers of alcohol!) are just two solutions that immediately come to mind. All parents could support that even if it turned out their child was just an unfortunate victim of bad timing (showing up at a gathering right before or after someone else showed up with alcohol). We could chalk that up to

Parents, more than anyone else, have the greatest impact on the actions of children.

character building. When you make a parent chose between his child and a principle (no pun intended), the parent will choose the child every time.

The point is that schools attempt to fight teenage drinking but end up destroying the resolve of the very group that's the most influential in combating teenage drinking. Parents, more than anyone else, have the greatest impact on the actions of children. Parents serve as role models to their own children and their children's friends and acquaintances. If we can't get all the parents on the same page, how can we possibly think we can stop teenage drinking? Kids don't drink because a foolish grocery clerk sold alcohol to them. Kids drink because it appears respectable for adults to drink—so why not them?

We set an example for our kids every day. It's hard for most adults to tell 18-year-olds they're not mature enough to handle drinking, but they are mature enough to fight a war for us. The only ones who can make sense of that kind of logic are the parents. The only people who can talk to kids and set an example every day of their lives until the kids are of age are parents. If the parents aren't united in the quest to control teenage drinking, then the short answer to the question "what can we do about teenage drinking" is—nothing!

they actually end up weakening their support group (the parents). For example, take a school policy that says any student athlete that is caught in attendance, or is reported to have been in attendance, at any location where alcohol was consumed by anybody is guilty of breaking the student athletic code. The punishment is usually banishment from the team. This tends to come up around playoff time.

Now imagine your child is a senior and this is his or her only chance to compete for a state title. When you, as a parent, find out your child has been reported by someone to have been in attendance at a party or gathering where someone had alcohol, you immediately feel a compulsion to circle the wagons and protect your child. Isn't a person innocent until proven guilty? This is where the dividing comes in.

The parents of all the athletes feel a need to fight for their

Kids drink because it appears respectable for adults to drink—so why not them?

sons' or daughters' right to compete. The parents of other team members are also upset because their own child's chances of success are now at risk because part of their team is being banished. After all, most of those kids will never in their lives have another chance to feel the thrill of victory or the agony of defeat on the athletic field.

The administration of the school becomes the enemy even though its intent was to set such a high standard that every kid playing on a team would not get within a mile of alcohol.

By trying to provide a zero

What message do we send about alcohol?

By SCOTT KANE
DEPUTY SHERIFF,
HANCOCK COUNTY,
TOWN OF BLUE HILL

Having been asked to write an article for Peninsula Area Team for Health, I had to take a few moments to stop and think about what would be appropriate and what message I am trying to have the readers take away from the article. I by no means want my message to offend anyone nor do I wish to make it seem as though I am preaching or judging anyone. With this in mind, let me share with you the word "perspective," give you mine on a few issues and let you compare it to yours.

The most important thing I have learned from young people is that they learn the most from what they see being done by people they love and respect.

I have been a deputy sheriff and DARE officer for the Hancock County Sheriff's Department for almost 15 years. The last three years I have been assigned to my current position as contract deputy for the town of Blue Hill. Having grown up in Hancock County and specifically Surry and the Peninsula area, I am familiar with the many changes in the area over the past 40 or so years.

I know that during those years my perspective has changed on many things, including the issue of drugs and alcohol. Having grown up with parents who did not use tobacco or drugs and very rarely alcohol, I was fortunate not to be exposed to the problems caused by these substances. The choice of whether to use these substances was mine when I reached the magic age of 18 when alcohol and tobacco were legal. At that time, my perspective was that tobacco was not terribly harmful, drugs came from the pharmacy, and alcohol was not a big deal because I could take it or leave it. Nice to be young and naïve, huh?

In 1984, I became a part-time deputy and then in 1991 became full-time and was trained in DARE. At that point I became more familiar with drugs and alcohol and most specifically alcohol. I began to work with young people and also had to deal with adults who had a problem with alcohol. I think that the most important thing I have learned from young people is that they learn the most from what they see being done by people they love and respect.

This brings me to 2005 and the perspective that I have today on the issue of alcohol.

I truly believe that most of the people we come in contact with on a day-to-day basis are kind, thoughtful, caring people. Most of them are people you might ask to baby-sit your own son or daughter. This perspective is probably shared by most of us, and this belief comes from the way our parents raised us. This same group of people may have a different perspective than you when you stop and look at the picture from a distance.

What's your perspective?

Take this example, for instance. Several years ago, the sheriff's department sponsored a DARE Fun Night at the YMCA in Ellsworth. This event was to celebrate with approximately 150 area DARE graduates their commitment to be drug- and alcohol-free. The students arrived by bus and I was asked by one of the bus drivers if he could speak to me. He told me that while sitting in the parking lot of the school waiting for the kids to arrive, a parent drove up in a pickup and dropped off his daughter for the

Alcohol has become acceptable for any age and that as long as no one gets hurt, it is okay to drink.

event. The bus driver told me that, from his elevated vantage point, he could clearly see that the parent had a bottle of beer between his legs as he drove in, dropped off his daughter and drove away.

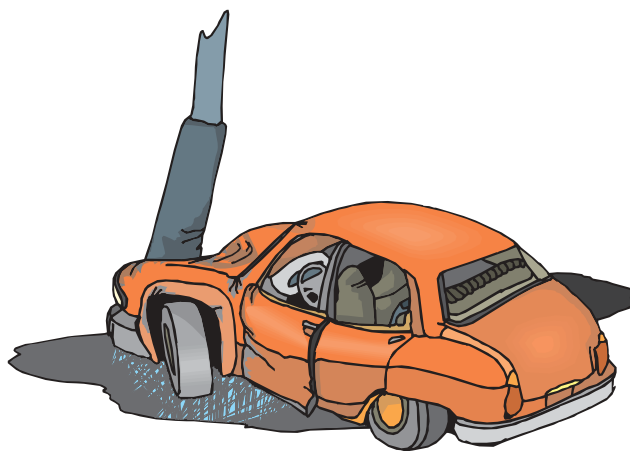
My perspective on this is a parent sending a mixed message to a child and modeling behavior that is both illegal and dangerous. Does the parent have a problem and can't wait to drink at home, or is this accepted behavior because "everyone does it?" Can't the parent take the child to a drug- and alcohol-free event without drinking? What is your perspective on this?

My second story goes like this. I took the opportunity to attend a local event as a spectator and to enjoy the fun time. The event was sponsored by a group of people with the intention to do good things for local kids with the money raised from this event.

The event was held outside on

school and public property and had a large turn-out of both kids and adults. People at the event were smiling, laughing and enjoying themselves. I was parked and sat back to watch the event when a vehicle pulled in beside me and the male driver got out, drinking from a can of beer. He walked into the event to participate, still drinking the beer. No sooner had this person gone in when a second vehicle parked on the other side of me and another male got out and joined the activity, also drinking a beer.

After watching for about 15 minutes, I had to leave due to the number of people drinking in public with kids running around everywhere. There were at least two participants who



were visibly intoxicated to the point that they were staggering.

My perspective is that it is not okay to drink in public and become intoxicated with young people around, even if the intention is to raise funds for a worthwhile cause. As an aside, how many of these people drove themselves home—and had kids with them? What is your perspective on this one? Do we have to drink at every event in order to have fun? What message does that send to our children?

Story three is about a parent that I recently had to have sign a summons for her child because I had caught her child for illegal possession of alcohol by a minor. The mother kind of smiled and asked what the punishment would be. After I told her, the response was, "Oh, that is not so bad" and signed the summons. The mother then went on to proclaim that it was "no big deal, every kid is doing it." The mother left with the summons and left me scratching my head.

My perspective is that alcohol has become acceptable for any age and that as long as no one gets hurt, it is okay to drink. Many times parents have told me that it is okay for their children to drink when they know where their children are and who they are with. Alcohol use by minors in many households is a "rite of passage" or is "okay because I drank when I was that age." What is your perspective?

Take a moment the next time

you drive the local roads or are at the local store between about 3:30 and 6 p.m. Notice how many people go into the store and buy only one or two beers. Maybe I am wrong on this, but I am going to guess that the beer did not make it home in the original container. I am going

Do we have to drink at every event in order to have fun? What message does that send to our children?

to guess that the beer was drunk on the ride home to help "relax" after a day of hard work or just to enjoy for the ride because it is a nice day, or whatever other reason the person uses to justify drinking and driving. The people bought and drank the beer, then threw out the cans so as not to be caught with them in the vehicle if stopped

by law enforcement. By the looks of the sides of the road, I think my perspective on this one may be correct. What is yours?

As a deputy for years, I have arrested many people for operating under the influence. Of those arrested, most, when asked, will say they only had "two beers" or "a couple of drinks." I have arrested people who have stated that "I am not drunk, I have only drunk two six packs and can still walk." I have been told by drivers that "I had to drive, I was too drunk to walk." I have had to carry people to my cruiser because they were so intoxicated they could not walk, yet they still got in the car to drive.

Granted these are extreme



examples, but these people all started drinking at some point in their lives and statistically many of them at an illegal age. I don't think I have to give you my perspective on this; so what is yours?

Too many times our perspec-

tive changes only when a tragedy occurs. When someone we care about dies or is badly hurt, everybody asks, how could that happen? Where were the cops when this was going on? Why didn't someone do something before, because the cops all knew this was going on? The community gets into an uproar for a while, then over time we forget and life gets back to "normal."

Change in attitude

I am not shirking my responsibility as a deputy sheriff and will follow up on any complaint or information that is brought to my attention, but the cold, hard truth is that someone else knew that there was a problem before I did—so why didn't they take care of it? Why didn't that person take time to talk to a child about underage drinking and make it clear that it will not be accepted and there will be a punishment if this rule is bro-

The problem of underage drinking will not be solved without a change in attitude from everyone.

ken? Why doesn't each person stop and look in the mirror and look at the message we are sending and modeling to children and their friends?

The problem of underage drinking will not be solved without a change in attitude from everyone. Breaking the law by underage drinking should not be accepted any more than stealing or assault. The bottom line is that it is illegal to possess or consume alcohol by anyone under the age of 21. It is also illegal for anyone to provide a place for minors to consume, or to supply alcohol to anyone under the age of 21.

The Hancock County Sheriff's Department has received a grant from the Office of Substance Abuse to address the problem of underage drinking. We will be aggressively following up on any information on parties where alcohol is served or supplied to minors. We will be working with targeted patrol in areas where this activity is going on and will be issuing summons and making arrests where appropriate. Please don't wait until another tragedy, your arrest, or a \$1,000 fine changes your perspective on this problem.