

# Youth Wellness Initiative begins campaign against underage drinking

By Bridget Manley December 5, 2007

From the Craig, CO, Daily Press.

Lori and Lennie Gillam, co-owners of Stockmen's Liquor in Craig, know some underage youths in Moffat County try to purchase liquor.

They've seen the youths attempt it. "It's a fact of the business," Lori said.

They also notice when underage drinking prevention works. When the community began hosting after-prom parties for high school students, alcohol sales at their store during prom weekend noticeably dropped, the couple said.

The Gillams were two of several community representatives who attended the second meeting of the Youth Wellness Initiative Tuesday night. The group, which included representatives from the Moffat County justice system, high school administration and parents, generated strategies to prevent and reduce underage drinking in Moffat County.

The Youth Wellness Initiative is a grant-funded committee under the Northwest Colorado Community Health Project. The committee's first meeting presented the project's three-pronged approach to preventing and reducing underage drinking. Although the group's first meeting was educational, the second meeting asked committee members to formulate approaches to curbing the problem.

At the onset, facilitators placed responsibility in the hands of those who attended the meeting.

"Don't let us tell you what to do," said Mary Housley, Grand Futures Prevention Coalition tri-county executive director.

Among the strategies committee members suggested were increased education opportunities for local liquor retailers. Currently, training is available for alcohol sales employees, said Chad Kiniston, Moffat County Grand Futures director. Among other alcohol-related topics, the training teaches employees how to identify false identification cards that a teen might use to purchase alcohol.

The training, known as TIPS, is mandatory for alcohol retailers and bar employees who fail to pass routine compliance checks, Kiniston said. (I'll check to see if this is an ordinance--gr)

Compliance checks ascertain if alcohol retailers are abiding by state law by sending minors into liquor stores, who then attempt to purchase alcohol.

Currently, Kiniston is the only qualified administrator of the training in Moffat County. Lori Gillam suggested making this training available to all liquor stores and bars.

"It would give us a foot to stand on, so we're not flying blind," Gillam said.

The cost of the training prevents Kiniston from issuing it to more individuals, the director said. Funding more TIPS trainings through Grand Futures is one of the projects the Youth Wellness Initiative intends to implement before its next meeting in January. Other projects included producing posters that list the penalties for purchasing alcohol for minors. The committee intends to place these posters in stores selling alcohol. The Gillams remind their employees to card every customer, no exceptions, they said.

Yet, they know they alone cannot stop underage drinking.

"It's not my right" to question what legal alcohol purchasers do with their alcohol, Lori said — even if the purchaser intends to give the alcohol to minors, she added.

The couple attended the meeting to help prevent underage drinking by encouraging parent responsibility, Lennie said.