

Liquor retailers to get TIPS on alcohol serving

Genevieve Reilly, Staff Writer. Published: 10:11 p.m., Thursday, October 14, 2010

Lorraine “Red” Hutchinson has been a manager at Moe’s Wines and Spirits on the Post Road in Fairfield for seven and a half years now, ever since it opened. And she’s probably been attending forums and workshops on preventing underage drinking just as long.

“I think it’s a good idea,” Hutchinson said, and she’ll be in attendance at a retailer’s forum scheduled for Oct. 25 at Sacred Heart University. “I think it should be mandatory.”

In Trumbull, a similar forum will be held in November, sponsored by the police department and the Trumbull Partnership Against Underage Drinking.

“This is the first time we’ve done it,” Trumbull Police Chief Thomas Kiely said. “With the technology with the fake IDs, something you learned three years ago is probably useless. You almost have to keep on this stuff on a yearly basis.”

Fairfield’s forum will include John Suchy, head of the Liquor Control Commission, who will talk about the laws governing alcohol sales, and Lt. Thomas Mrozek, who will give an update on fake IDs being used by underage shoppers and tips on how to spot a fake ID. Tony Lota from Dichello Distributors will talk about the TIPS training program, which is available free of charge. A skill-based training program, TIPS is designed to prevent intoxication, underage drinking and drunken driving.

Both Mrozek and Suchy will be featured at Trumbull’s Nov. 8 forum at the Trumbull Marriott. In addition, Trumbull will provide TIPS training to all alcohol servers in town, sponsored by the Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of Connecticut, on Nov. 6.

TIPS -- Training for Intervention Procedures -- is a nationally recognized program that not only has been proven effective in reducing drunken driving and underage drinking, it also provides a reasonable defense against liquor liability laws and minimizing property damage caused by intoxicated patrons.

“I really think it’s a smart thing for business owners to participate in,” Kiely said, and based on the reaction from the business community so far, he’s expecting 100 percent participation.

Lota said TIPS is a “practical, common sense approach to serving alcohol responsibly in any setting.” Many insurance companies, he said, provide discounts to establishments whose employees are TIPS certified, and the certification sharpens a server’s skills and knowledge. “TIPS-trained servers enhance an establishment’s public image,” Lota said. “Training results in added professionalism and improved customer service.”

“The forum will provide information to liquor retailers about their responsibilities as it relates to not selling to minors and some effective strategies for employees to assist in detecting fake or fraudulent licenses and identity cards,” Suchy said. They will also learn about how his department conducts compliance checks, used to identify those retailers “who would sell to an obviously underage person.”

In Fairfield, an invitation has been sent to all local retailers to attend the free forum, and police have asked that at least one person from each business attend in order to receive updated material. The event is sponsored by the police department, Sacred Heart and the Fairfield Cares Coalition.

Fairfield Police Chief Gary MacNamara said keeping alcohol away from underage youth is a department goal. The information received from the forum, he said, could help keep a business “from being investigated by our department as a possible violator.”

“I will be attending,” Hutchinson said, adding that in some cases, the retailers might be able to help law enforcement. She said she also likes to send employees who she thinks can use some help in checking IDs.