

Should restaurant managers be required to take alcohol server training?

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<http://www.charlestoncitypaper.com/RockBottom/archives/2012/04/16/should-restaurant-managers-be-required-to-take-alcohol-server-training>

We've gotten a lot of passionate responses to our story last week on the problem of alcoholism in Charleston's food and beverage industry. Some people said there is a lack of reasonably priced taxi services to take restaurant employees home after 2 a.m. closing time. Others said we were off-base in writing the story in the first place. And one longtime Charleston bartender, Keith Purdy, sent us an e-mail to say that South Carolina ought to make alcohol-safety classes mandatory for anyone serving alcohol — including waiters, bartenders, and even management.

Purdy has been bartending since 1978, when he picked up a job while studying at the College of Charleston. He now runs a company called A Southern Bartender, offering catering services as well as classes for servers. In his classes, Purdy goes over things like the differing effects of alcohol on men and women, the extent of bartenders' liability in DUI cases, and how to spot a person who has had too much to drink.

Recently, he gave a training session to 30 employees at a downtown seafood establishment after explaining to the management that a victim of a DUI accident could sue them if the offender had been drinking at the restaurant. He says the managers were shocked to learn they could be held liable.

He understands why some managers and owners don't want to pay for their employees to get server training through a program like ServeSafe or TIPS (Training for Intervention Procedures), which Purdy charges \$50 per employee to provide. "Bar owners feel like it's a tax to have to train these people when they may not be there but another month or two," he said in a phone interview.

That's why, if Purdy were king for a day, he would require all alcohol servers to pay to take a one-time alcohol-service course and get a state-issued bartender's license (and we would like to acknowledge that, yes, Purdy stands to make some money off of this). If a server were found selling alcohol to minors or to people who were already drunk, officials could yank his or her license. His idea isn't unprecedented. In 2010, Indiana began requiring all servers to take a training course when they start serving alcohol, plus a refresher course every three years.

Purdy has been called on as an expert witness in about a dozen alcohol-service lawsuits in the state, and he says the issue of server training has come up in every one of them. As for the pending lawsuit against the Neighborhood Dining Group, in which the owners of Husk are being asked to pay damages for an alleged DUI accident involving a Husk manager, he says the company probably wouldn't get off the hook just for having put their manager through TIPS training. It would help their case, though, and in some cases it could lessen the damages they have to pay.

"Well, it would be good PR," he says.