

EASTON - Stoneforge Grill and Brennan's Grille and Irish Tavern will lose their liquor licenses for a single day on Feb. 25 because selectmen found them guilty of selling beer to underage patrons in a police sting operation last fall. *From the Brockton, MA, Enterprise.*

Three package stores implicated in the same sting — Pop's Fine Wine and Liquors on Depot Street, Dynasty Convenience on Washington Street and Lil Peach on Columbus Avenue — will wait another month to learn their fate while the town's lawyer investigates whether a procedural error occurred.

Selectmen held five public hearings on the license violations on Monday night. Police conduct compliance checks twice a year as part of an effort by selectmen to crack down on underage drinking in the college town.

Stoneforge owner William Roland apologized to selectmen because on Nov. 5 a bartender served beer to two 19-year-old Stonehill College sophomores secretly working for police and did not ask them for identification.

"We're quite embarrassed to be here tonight," Roland said.

The bartender was fired, and Stoneforge has since begun conducting its own "internal stings" for workers in all its restaurants, Roland said.

Employees who remember to ask for identification in the stings are rewarded with \$25 gift certificates, Roland said. Those who fail a first time are suspended. A second offense results in termination.

Brennan's owner, Stephen Brennan, also apologized because a bartender served beer to the same students at his restaurant on Nov. 12. He also fired the bartender.

"I'm very sorry," said Brennan. "I take this very seriously. It's unacceptable."

Brennan said that within 30 days, he will purchase and install a machine that verifies the authenticity of identification cards to make up for the infraction. As a result, selectmen gave him a one-day license suspension rather than a proposed two-day suspension.

Roland also said he would buy the machine for Stoneforge.

Both Stoneforge and Brennan's require their employees to undergo alcohol-server training, commonly referred to as "TIPs," or "Training for Intervention Procedures." But it was evident during the hearing that some package stores do not.

Dynasty Convenience owner, Stephen Allen, and his daughter were TIPs trained. They trained their employee, who then sold an 18-pack of beer to one of the Stonehill students on Oct. 30 without asking for identification.

Allen said that employee was sent immediately for TIPs training. Allen agreed with selectmen Chairman Colleen A. Corona's recollection that when Allen was awarded his liquor license, he was told by selectmen that all his employees should be TIPs trained.

"I'm just throwing myself at your mercy," said Allen. "I'm just mortified. I'm sincerely sorry."

Elizabeth C. Parveg, owner of the former Lil Peach, now a Tedeschi Food Shops, was not as apologetic. She told selectmen her clerk's story of selling beer to the underage Stonehill student differed from the student's version.

The student, Andrew Lesko, testified that he put a 30-pack of beer on the store's counter and then discovered he did not have enough money.

The clerk, Debra Levangie, asked if he was 21, and he said no, Lesko said. She then asked if he had identification and he said no, giving her his real birth date.

“She proceeded to assist me in paying for alcohol out of her own money,” Lesko said. “She took \$3 out of her own pocketbook and rang up the alcohol ... She said she felt bad for me that I was \$3 short.”

But Parveg said the clerk did ask Lesko for identification, and that Lesko said he had left it in his apartment. Parveg said the clerk knew Lesko from working at Stonehill and said she would lend him the \$3.

Parveg also pointed out that state guidelines on police stings say that when an underage person is asked for identification, he is supposed to leave the store immediately.

Lesko said he tried to leave, but the clerk called him back.

Selectmen also heard a complaint from Robert Hamalian, manager of Pop’s Fine Wines and Spirits, who said he was not adequately notified by police that they would be conducting compliance checks.

Hamalian pointed out that state guidelines read: “Notification that a compliance check will be taking place will be made to the media prior to the start date.”

Hamalian said he saw an item in the weekly Easton Journal on Nov. 2 that said police would conduct the checks “in November.” His compliance check took place on Oct. 30, Hamalian noted.

“If this is the (newspaper) copy and (the compliance check) happened in October it’s really not fair,” said Hamalian, whose clerk admitted selling beer to the underage student without asking for identification.

The town’s lawyer, Ellen Callahan Doucette, will check to make sure proper procedure was followed. The cases of the three stores were continued to Feb. 25.