

Bartenders train in how to spot, handle those who've had too much

*By Melissa Guay Sunday, October 21, 2007 9:27 PM EDT
From the Glens Falls, NY, Post-Star.*

QUEENSBURY -- A handful of area bartenders received tips of a different sort Tuesday morning, as Adirondack Community College conducted a course to help them identify and prevent alcohol-related issues.

"Training for Intervention Procedures for Servers of Alcohol," or TIPS, is offered through Virginia-based Health Communications Inc.

The program focuses on identifying the effects of alcohol, identifying when a person has consumed too much of it and how to deal with the situation should over-indulging occur.

The program also addresses ways to spot underage drinkers.

Frank Burns, instructor for the TIPS course and member of the ACC adjunct faculty, said those in attendance receive a three-year certificate from Health Communications and from the state Liquor Authority once they've passed a 40-question test. [He does a lot of RVP training-gr]

"This training and these certificates help establishments guard against potential liability lawsuits," Burns said. "Servers can use this program to prevent and defend against lawsuits, and completion of this program can also make establishments eligible for a 10 to 20 percent discount on liquor liability insurance."

And though turnout for the course was low — only five attended — Burns said programs like TIPS are gaining recognition from lawmakers at the county, state, and federal levels.

He said there is currently a bill being considered at the state level to require this type of training for all alcohol servers within their first 90 days of employment.

"The industry is changing rapidly. It's getting more and more difficult to get a liquor license, and there are more and more (underage drinking) stings," Burns said. "There are more DWI stops and checkpoints, and servers and establishments can be held liable."

On the low attendance, Burns said the issue is that owners and operators don't feel the training is important yet. He said that will have to change once such training is state mandated.

"Anyone who doesn't do this training is nuts," he added.

Nine-year bartending veteran Tracy Suttle was on hand for what she characterized as a refresher course for her job as the head bartender of the Fraternal Order of the Eagles club in South Glens Falls.

"I've learned from experience, but it's nice to have the backup," she said.

Suttle and co-worker Marcie Baker were signed up for the course by their boss.

"We have no problem telling people when they're about done," Baker said of those they serve at the Eagles club. "We've taken people home or called cabs, but we don't really have a lot to worry about. It's a family atmosphere there."

Both Suttle and Baker said they're open to learning new ways to deal with over-indulgers, and underage drinkers aren't an issue, as members of the club have to be at least 21 to join.

But several tips provided during the course, such as the way carbonation increases alcohol

absorption, had even the most seasoned servers whispering, “I didn’t know that.”

Burns also told the class that a high tolerance to alcohol doesn’t reflect blood-alcohol content, but rather only delays the behavioral cues of intoxication.

Coping tools, such as offering food, measuring drinks, calling police or enlisting help from the friends of an intoxicated guest, were also addressed.

Burns said thorough documentation of any alcohol-related incident can greatly increase one’s defense if a lawsuit does occur.

The TIPS program was offered as part of a \$100,000 State University of New York hospitality grant, shared among 12 colleges, said Louis Buck, dean of the ACC Center for Personal & Professional Development. A \$50 registration fee was paid by each person attending.

“We decided on this program because the hospitality industry is so prevalent, especially in this area. This is part of the industry,” Buck said. “DWI issues are real issues, and this training can help deter incidences.

“We’re only sorry there aren’t more people here for the class. This is extremely important training — for them and for the community.”