

Hog Wild's Beer License Suspended

Published 03/25/2008

From the Kingsport, TN, Times News.

KINGSPORT — The Hog Wild Saloon will have its beer license suspended for 20 days and a remediation plan will be crafted for how the establishment will better control its parking lot, the Kingsport Beverage Board decided Monday.

The suspension comes not only in the wake of two recent high-profile incidents at the saloon (a stabbing and an out-of-control vehicle), but after what board members say is an increase in the severity of incidents taking place in the parking lot of the Hog Wild and adjacent Westside Inn.

The board held a show cause hearing Monday afternoon and for more than two hours heard testimony from Kingsport police officers and saloon representatives on the types of incidents taking place on the property and what measures are being done to help with security.

In the end, the board voted 5-4 to suspend the Hog Wild's beer license for 20 days and to have the saloon craft a remediation plan in writing on how it plans to curb the number of incidents taking place in the parking lot. The board also intends to review monthly — for the next six months — any incidents that do occur at the Hog Wild and write a letter to the state Alcoholic Beverage Commission informing them of the suspension.

According to city records, this suspension marks the first time the Hog Wild has ever had its beer license suspended by the city. The board could have imposed a \$500 fine instead of suspension, something several board members endorsed.

During Monday's hearing, City Attorney Mike Billingsley submitted a packet of police reports of incidents that have occurred at the Hog Wild since April 2007, including public intoxication, assault, DUI, illegal firearm possession and vandalism.

Andrew Reardon, one of the owners of the Hog Wild, testified that with most of those incidents, Hog Wild employees were the ones who called the police, in some it was minors being denied access, and one woman charged with DUI was not served alcohol at the saloon.

In the last 12 months, Reardon said around 60,000 people have come through the saloon, and in those police reports submitted by Billingsley, maybe five or six were actual customers.

The two incidents that received much of the attention during Monday's hearing were the stabbing and the runaway vehicle.

In January, Michael Lyons of Eidson drove his truck through the establishment's parking lot, striking several people and a support pillar of the building and damaging nine vehicles. The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation crime lab reported Lyons' blood alcohol content was 0.15. Reardon testified none of his employees remember serving him alcohol but believed he was in the saloon that night.

Lyons told police the accelerator stuck on his Dodge Dakota pickup truck, but Kingsport police reported Chrysler officials came to Kingsport, inspected the vehicle and found no sign of defect or malfunction.

As for the stabbing incident, Donnie and Jeremy Hutchins allegedly attacked Jason Gentry with a knife and golf club in the parking lot of the establishment. Gentry suffered numerous lacerations to his face, jaw and neck, with one deep laceration only inches from his jugular vein.

Reardon testified the Hog Wild has taken numerous steps to help with security and to help prevent incidents like these from happening in the future. Reardon said the saloon puts up a barrier and cones in the parking lot to prevent vehicles from driving in front of the establishment and that he personally

patrols the parking lot in a golf cart from 10 p.m to 3 a.m.

Other measures taken include hiring three more security guards; having more security in the parking lot; sending the entire staff through the TIPS training program for alcohol sales, service and use; adding a fence to the back parking lot; adding outdoor lighting and security cameras; using a metal detector wand at the door; and purchasing an electronic ID machine used to scan and store every patron's identification for security and future reference.

"A large number of incidents took place in the parking lot," said Greg Francisco, Reardon's attorney. "They're trying to do the right thing. A lot of times, it's us trying to help law enforcement."

Board members were impressed with the actions taken by Reardon and his staff and their sincerity but believed a suspension was necessary to send a message that Kingsport would not tolerate the types of incidents that have occurred at the Hog Wild.

Police Chief Gale Osborne told board members there is a bigger picture than what Hog Wild officials were saying on Monday.

"My history has been the bouncers want to just get rid of the intoxicated person. If you look at the history — the number of violations — someone is going to die in the parking lot unless we take control," Osborne said. "There's a trend of increased problems, and it's a major problem."

Billingsley said the Hog Wild has to take some responsibility for the patrons leaving their establishment.

Board member Keener Mallicote said the runaway vehicle incident could have resulted in six people getting killed.

"In the end there needs to be better results outside," Mallicote said.

Osborne said the department would be glad to help the Hog Wild and admitted the owners have tried their best to improve.

"I can't ignore the facts, pattern and trend. It's not at an acceptable level to me, and I'm worried someone will get hurt badly," he said.

Board Chair Tom Parham reminded board members they have been tracking incidents at the Hog Wild for three years and not just since the vehicle accident occurred in January. The board held an informal meeting with Hog Wild officials in August to discuss their concerns.

"The trend has not improved. We have the responsibility to send a message. This is a serious situation ... that needs a serious penalty," Parham said.