

'Sting' brings alcohol service under fire

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Underage drinkers are being served in our community and Treatment Court Coordinator Kathy Anderson wants to put an end to it by training restaurants and other businesses selling liquor and malt beverages in some responsible sales tactics.

Anderson met with the Pinedale Town Council at its Monday meeting to discuss a program that will soon be available for Sublette County business owners and their employees to ensure they are not selling or serving alcohol to an underage individual.

The issue came to the foreground due to a recent "sting" on local businesses to determine if they check the IDs of young drinkers. Of the businesses involved, four were issued citations for selling beverages to an underage person in the presence of the undercover officer.

With this recent sting – and licenses for 16 businesses up for renewal or approval (five retail, one limited, one brewery, eight restaurant renewals and one new restaurant application) – Anderson said she felt the time was right to broach the subject of the training.

"My concern is that, as far as I can count ... there are too many (underage sales happening) in this county," she said. "I think it would behoove us as a community to look into this program."

The TIPS (Training for Intervention ProcedureS) program trains servers, sellers and consumers of alcohol how to prevent intoxication, drunk driving and underage drinking. Robena Downey, head of the Prevention Coalition, is currently training to provide the program to interested parties in the county. This program is growing in response to 2003 Wyoming state legislation urging the Liquor Division to establish a training program for servers that promotes safe and responsible consumption.

An owner of a business cited for underage sales spoke at the meeting on behalf of his own business and practices, stating the citation was given to a specific employee and that employee was terminated immediately.

Mike Gilmore, owner of Country Lane Liquor, said he has a background in law enforcement and works diligently to ensure that his employees are following the law.

"You can do everything humanly possible," he said. "But the bottom line is it comes down to that employee."

The town was receptive to Anderson's requests and concerns. However, they determined because only citations were given and no one had been found guilty of the infractions, and in some cases the citation was given to a specific employee who was not an owner, it would not be fair to withhold license approval. They did agree the program could be beneficial to consider as a future requirement for permits and licensing procedures. Licenses are renewed yearly.

"I hoped by my comments to raise the awareness of the council and the citizens to the ongoing danger of such criminal behavior as selling liquor to individuals under the age of 21 and (hopefully) trigger some thought/action rather than an automatic rubber-stamp of renewal applications," Anderson said after the meeting. "My future actions will include participating in, one, drafting a proposed ordinance and providing it to Ed Wood for review; two, addressing the Town Council and educating them on the TIPS program; and, three, advocating for reasonable and responsible measures to endure the health and safety of our county's most precious resource, our children."