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Youngwood school serves up 10,000-plus safe bartenders

By Alicia Mcelhaney

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Dan Clougherty, the owner of Wines, Steins and Cocktails, a professional bartending school in Youngwood, teaches people how to serve alcoholic beverages with a healthy shot of responsibility.

Health Communications Inc. recently gave the school the 2014 Training for Intervention Procedures, or TIPS, Award of Excellence for the number of employees certified in the program, as well as good feedback from students.

TIPS started in 1982 as a way to teach bartenders, bar backs, servers and managers how to safely serve alcohol.

Of the 3 million certified in TIPS nationwide, Wines, Steins and Cocktails has trained more than 10,000 bartenders and servers.

"Wines, Steins and Cocktails has played an integral part in ensuring hospitality professionals are not only equipped with exemplary bartending skills, but are empowered to provide some of the best service in the industry," HCI's President and CEO, Adam Chafetz, said in a press release. He could not be reached for comment.

"Society rightly demands that we should sell alcohol responsibly," Clougherty said.

He said TIPS not only teaches others how to safely serve alcohol, but also redirects the blame for alcohol's harmful effects from the server to the consumer.

In short, it's training that not only protects the customer, but also the server, Clougherty said.

Training programs for alcohol awareness, like TIPS and the Responsible Alcohol Management Program, or RAMP, come in many shapes and sizes.

They are typically one-day sessions, and many are completed online. Most outline laws on alcohol and teach students what rules they must follow when serving.

Students complete a multiple-choice exam at the end of the program to qualify for certification.

The TIPS program taught by Clougherty and his wife, Barbara, encourages far more student participation.

While students still complete the program in one day, they learn through simulating ID checks and making sure customers make it home safely, Clougherty said.

"We legitimately practice these things," Clougherty said. Students "can internalize the techniques to the point of spontaneity."

Barbara Clougherty, who typically teaches the TIPS program, said the class focuses on ways alcohol affects different people, cues to look for in determining drunkenness and techniques for handling intoxicated customers.

"TIPS tries to keep people from having a problem with intoxication, but it also teaches students how to deal with already intoxicated people and with cutting people off without fighting about it," she said.

Dan Clougherty said that no bartender trained through the TIPS program since its inception more than 20 years ago has been sued in a third-party lawsuit for irresponsibly serving alcohol. Because of this, he said, some insurance companies are beginning to offer discounts on liability insurance to bars that require bartenders or servers to get TIPS training.

"Bars can get 20 to 25 percent off their insurance, which translates into thousands of dollars saved," Clougherty said.

“People are taking it much more seriously,” he said. “This is truly training that will protect them.”

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