Law enforcement steps up approach to underage drinking

Thursday, April 2, 2009
Caddo Sheriff's deputies and Shreveport police are stepping up enforcement efforts to curb underage drinking and sales to minors.

Today, Sheriff Steve Prator and Police Chief Henry Whitehorn announced plans to reduce teen drinking during prom season by targeting those who illegally sell alcohol to persons under 21.

Prator and Whitehorn said deputies and police are conducting compliance checks of retail liquor establishments in the parish and inside the city to ensure employees check for proper identification and only sell alcohol to those who are of legal age. The operation will also include surveillance of liquor stores to watch for minors who purchase alcohol or adults who purchase alcohol for a minor.

Compliance checks are conducted by law enforcement using a person under 21who enters a liquor establishment and attempts to purchase alcohol. If asked for ID, the person provides their correct ID or says they have no ID. If the sale still occurs, the seller is cited by law enforcement, which is waiting nearby. Business owners also face penalties for violations that occur inside their stores.

"This is a warning to every teen and every business person who sells alcohol in Caddo Parish and Shreveport," Prator said. "We will be visiting your business, maybe on more than one occasion. We will be watching to see if minors are visiting your business.

"Our goal is simple. We want to keep alcohol out of the hands of children. I'll be pleased if we don't need to write any citations, but if you don't follow the law, we won't hesitate to make an arrest."

Whitehorn added: "Collaboration is the key to keeping our children safe. This effort is all about law enforcement stepping up and aggressively addressing those offenders who would break the law and put our children at risk. Young people are our future and we simply will not tolerate these violations."

Quick Facts on Alcohol Consumption by Youth in Louisiana*

Underage drinking is widespread in Louisiana. Approximately 206,000 underage youth in Louisiana drink each year. According to self-reports by Louisiana students in grades 9-12:

*77% of 12th graders had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more days during their life.
*11% of 12th graders had their first drink of alcohol before 7th grade.
*50% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more occasion in the past 30 days.
*29% had five or more drinks of alcohol in a row (i.e. binge drinking) in the past 30 days.

In 2005, underage drinkers consumed 14.7% of all alcohol sold in Louisiana, totaling $305 million in sales. These sales provided profits of $148 million to the alcohol industry.

* Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE), October 2006