

- 1 Planning for Alcohol Availability in Ventura
- 3 Play Ball—But Play It Safe
- 5 The Community Gets a Say
- 7 Warning Label

The Ventura County edition of *Prevention File* is published in cooperation with the Ventura County Behavioral Health Department, Alcohol and Drug Programs, Prevention, Intervention, and Training Division. Please address all comments to Kathy Staples, Prevention, Intervention, and Training Division, 300 N. Hillmont, Ventura, CA 93003 or call 805/652-3341. E-mail: Kathleen.Staples@mail.co.ventura.ca.us.

RESIDENTS OF VENTURA WERE HAPPY TO HEAR THAT THE PACIFIC VIEW MALL was being refurbished and adding a food court to its shopping area.

But prevention advocates saw a red flag amidst the construction: The new food court would offer lots of tasty eats, but it would also include one restaurant that would sell alcohol.

"It would be fine and good if this were an enclosed restaurant, but this was going to be open, with takeout service to the food court," said Pat

- Mall food courts are magnets for teenagers—thus not a good place to sell beer.
- In an open food court, alcohol can easily be passed from adult purchasers to underage drinkers.
- The open seating plan would make it difficult for security guards to keep track of who was drinking what.
- Five entryways afforded a huge opportunity for alcohol to be purchased and carried outside, potentially to underage drinkers.

PLANNING FOR ALCOHOL AVAILABILITY AT THE MALL



Barrett of Ventura's Community Partners for Safer Neighborhoods. "This wasn't a good idea. The food court has five entrances and a toddler play area nearby."

Barrett's group protested—though friends told them this was sure to be a lost cause. Rubio's Baja Grill, the popular Mexican seafood chain that was building the restaurant, has a standard

menu. Cerveza is as much a part of that menu as are crispy fish tacos.

Barrett was not dissuaded. Her group wrote a letter of protest to police and the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, noting that a mall food court was a poor setting for selling alcoholic beverages. Their list of concerns included:

- Alcohol was to be served in disposable containers that could easily be transported off site.
- Drinking was not an appropriate activity to be taking place near an area designed for toddlers. What's more, Barrett noted that one of the malls in Ventura County had recently been a site for gang violence, and that there was alcohol involved in that incident.

To make her point, Barrett chose to visit the manager of the Pacific View Mall to explain residents' concerns to him.

"I told him that the physical environment was problematic," she said. "And that we felt the mall would need five security guards to police the food court if this (alcohol) license was approved."

Barrett said that the mall manager, who declined to comment for this article, told Rubio's that the expense for extra security guards would fall to the restaurant, not the mall.

Community Partners for Safer Neighborhoods did not hear much from Rubio's officials. But they



Barrett's group soon learned that a new California Pizza Kitchen restaurant was opening near the mall and had also applied for an alcohol license.

were pleased when the restaurant withdrew its license application some months later.

"It was a major win," Barrett said. "And, not only that, but the mall agreed to be alcohol-free for the next 10 years. We are going to take it one step further and ask them to make that permanent."

There was still one last problem in the food-court situation, however. Rubio's still carried beer advertising in its signage. Barrett's group asked that it be removed, and it was.

The victory was sweet, but it didn't take long for a new challenge to arise. Barrett's group soon learned that a new California Pizza Kitchen restaurant was opening near the mall and had also applied for an alcohol license. Because it was to be a controlled-access restaurant, separate from the food court, this might not have raised concern, but this restaurant was to have an open patio at the main entrance to the mall.

Dan Hicks of the Ventura office of the Institute for Public Strategies said this has the potential for creating problems, particularly when it is located near a mall that attracts teenagers.

"You don't want to bring (alcohol) advertising onto the patio or make it easy to pass drinks off the patio," Hicks said.

Barrett's group pounded out another letter of protest, aimed at California Pizza Kitchen. They agreed that the chain is known for being responsible and family-oriented, but they wanted assurances.

The response was swift, perhaps Barrett said, because the restaurant had already scheduled its opening and didn't want anything to interfere with that.

Restaurant officials agreed to comply with certain standard conditions, which included:

- That all alcoholic beverages are served in nondisposable (glass) containers. Beer containers will hold no more than 14 ounces and wine containers no more than 8 ounces.
- That there be no consumption of alcoholic beverages adjacent to the licensed premises.

- That there be no exterior advertising of any type, including advertising directed to the exterior from within, promoting or indicating the availability of alcoholic beverages.
- That there be no sales of T-shirts, caps or other materials promoting brands of alcohol.
- That at least 50 percent of the restaurant's sales receipts be for food.

The restaurant also took one step "over and above" the standard, Barrett said, in agreeing to send all members of their waitstaff to responsible server training.

"I acknowledge California Pizza Kitchen for doing this," Barrett said. "It costs them four hours' pay for (each of) 35 employees. That's pretty wonderful."

Probably even more important than the restaurant's agreeing to these conditions was the fact that Community Partners for Safer Neighborhoods was able to play a part in the approval process.

"We set a precedent," Barrett said. "Now, we'll be able to ask the next restaurant for the same."

Hicks agreed that having a part in the process was critical. Though the ABC has official authority in these matters, community members also want to have a voice.


"Rather than their saying, 'Oh, we'll have a meeting and let you know the results,' we're saying, 'No, we'll be at the meeting with you,'" Hicks said.

The issue is not about to go away. Already, another restaurant at the entrance to the mall, this one with a proposed bar and restaurant, has applied for a license to sell alcohol. The Red Robin, another major chain, is the applicant.

"We'll ask for the same conditions from them," Barrett said. "Each time we do it, it gets a little bit easier." □

Play Ball— But Play It Safe

Softball and alcohol were thought of in the same vein, like you couldn't have one without the other, but things were getting out of hand.

 RICHARD ARIAS HAS LOVED PLAYING RECREATIONAL SOFTBALL IN THE CITY OF OXNARD FOR MORE THAN 30 YEARS. But about six years ago, Arias, who serves as sports coordinator for the city's Department of Recreation and Community Services, became exasperated by the antics that seemed to accompany every game.

Taunting, profanities, and altercations—all fueled by excessive drinking—had become common among both the players and the crowd.

"Softball and alcohol were thought of in the same vein, like you couldn't have one without the other," Arias said. "But things were getting out of hand."

During a city championship game in 1995, Arias decided that he had had enough. A potential melee was brewing on the sidelines amongst intoxicated players who hadn't made the playoffs but were there to taunt the teams that had. Arias and his staffers stepped in and told the troublemakers they and their alcohol were no longer welcome.

"They said, 'You can't do this to us,' and we said, 'Yes, we can,'" Arias said. "There is actually a city regulation against alcohol at the games that has been around longer than I've been playing. It just hadn't been enforced before."

That day, under Arias' direction, recreational softball in the city of Oxnard went from complete tolerance to zero tolerance.

"That was very courageous of him," said Kathy Staples, senior program administrator for

the Ventura County Alcohol and Drug Programs' Prevention, Intervention and Training Division. "We applaud his efforts."

Arias had not been to any alcohol and other drug-prevention trainings, nor had any prevention advocates contacted him about excessive drinking





at the games. He had, however, become interested in making the city of Oxnard a healthier, safer place.

"A lot of people think of Oxnard as 'the ghetto,' as a really rough place," Arias said. "They think that when you go down to Oxnard, you've got to watch out. That image needs to change."

Arias thought the city's four softball fields, which host 1,600 male and female players and some 28 tournaments annually, were a good place to start.

Some of the players were not happy with this turn of events. They continued drinking and bringing alcohol to the games. They quickly learned that Arias meant business.

"If the umpire smells alcohol on you, you are not allowed to play," Arias said. "If you're belligerent and smell like alcohol, you're outta there."

Spectators are also expected to abide by the rules. Those caught drinking or carrying alcohol onto the fields or into the stands are asked to leave. Arias and his staff use a blue pickup truck to patrol the softball fields before and during games. This has become known as "The Booze Patrol."

There was never an organized protest to the new enforcement, but some teams were so disgruntled they left the city leagues.

Other, alcohol-free teams took their place. In addition, a sober softball league, made up of recovering alcoholics, began joining in tournaments and other activities they had previously avoided because of the drinking.

"In the end, we gained more teams than we lost," Arias said. "And they were people who were more happy about playing softball than about drinking."

When teams from outside the city come to play, they are also expected to abide by Oxnard's rules. Arias and his staff make those rules clear to outsiders well ahead of game time. Still, some disbelievers have to be set straight.

"We had one team come in carrying 12-packs," he said. "We said, 'We told you, and we told you. Now you're going to have to leave.'"

The atmosphere at the Oxnard games has changed completely. Formerly loud and rowdy gatherings have become family affairs.

"It used to be you wouldn't want your children to come to a game because of all the profanity," Arias said. "Now we have a lot of families coming to enjoy softball."

This cleanup happened without the assistance of police or any other enforcement agency, though recently Oxnard police have begun to help patrol the fields.

Sandy Carillo, who has been playing softball in Oxnard since 1992, said she has been relieved to see the new rules take effect.

"Previously, we had fights between players and fights between players and umpires," said Carillo, who is a senior deputy probation officer for Ventura County. "Now there is a much nicer environment. There is no violence, and everyone has a good time."

Besides the higher-quality environment, Carillo sees better playing—on her team and others.

"When you drink, it affects how you perform and how you react. Players do not perform as well when they are drinking, and they react to the umpire in ways that are embarrassing."

Carillo knows this well because, a year ago, she started umpiring as well as playing.

"I'm very glad Richard (Arias) enforces the rules, and he's strict about it," she said. "When we notice

a player who has alcohol on his or her breath, we can ask them to leave, and we are backed up."

Staples said Arias is one of the prominent citizens in what has become a communitywide effort to improve the city of Oxnard.

"The city of Oxnard has made dramatic advances in creating a healthier and safer environment," Staples said. "I would say it is probably the lead city in Ventura County. And it hasn't just been policy makers making this happen. It's the community members, like Richard Arias. Oxnard has many concerned and involved citizens."

Staples said Arias' achievement was especially noteworthy because of the ties between sports and alcohol in our culture.

"Alcohol has become a regular part of the sports culture; alcohol and sports go hand in hand," she said. "Unfortunately, the benefits of sports—the fellowship, the family aspects and the exercise—often get lost when alcohol is in the picture."

In the end, we gained more teams than we lost. And they were people who were more happy about playing softball than about drinking.

Staples said that pressure is felt on many levels—not just among adult recreational leagues. One alcohol distributor recently offered to sponsor uniforms for a children's soccer league in Oxnard; the company's name would have been emblazoned on those uniforms. Parents in Oxnard said "no thanks."

"Subsidized uniforms are bound to sound pretty good, especially to a low-income community," Staples said. But the parents didn't want their children to carry such advertising on their backs or to associate that name with soccer, which is something healthy.

Those same people who turned down the subsidized uniforms are now the people who pat Arias on the back for making Oxnard a place where anyone can play softball and anyone can watch without the pressure to drink or accept the obnoxious behavior of those who do.

Only one group seemed hurt by the new enforcement policy—Oxnard's homeless. They used to collect empty beer cans after softball games. They say that they used to be able to walk away with hundreds of cans and now are able to collect only a few soda cans after each match.

Staples said this only goes to show how much drinking was going on and what kinds of behaviors, such as littering, went hand in hand with that drinking. □

THE COMMUNITY GETS A SAY

WHEN OXNARD POLICE SGT. BRYAN MACDONALD BRINGS ALCOHOL LICENSING PROBLEMS

TO CITY OFFICIALS, he knows he'll always have community support.

Whether he is working on closing down a rowdy bar or questioning the location of a new liquor outlet, he knows that a variety of local coalitions will be actively involved. One of those is the Oxnard Responsible Alcohol Policy Coalition.

"This is very, very important, because our planning commission likes to hear public input," MacDonald said. "Oxnard is a place where you have a lot of community involvement. City officials think the community should always have a say."

Police and community members in this city have been working harmoniously together in prevention efforts since 1996, when the Oxnard Police Department received a grant from the Office of Traffic Safety to begin a Driving Under the Influence prevention program.

The Oxnard DUI Prevention Coalition—which would later become the Oxnard Responsible Alcohol Policy Coalition—was formed as a result of that grant.

"Originally, it was just DUI, but we knew almost immediately that it would be a prevention coalition," said Sharon O'Hara, project director for the coalition. "There were a number of things which needed to be looked at."

Indeed, the coalition has had a busy and productive five years dealing with a variety of prevention issues. The group is probably proudest of three ordinances it helped pass. These ordinances include:

- A requirement for temporary use permits for all special events involving alcohol that are held in the city. To obtain a permit, a group must agree to have all servers of alcoholic beverages trained in responsible beverage service. "From our smallest

church event to our big Strawberry Festival, everyone is required to have the training," O'Hara said.

- A comprehensive conditional use permit for all new alcohol licensees. Licensees must agree to have all of their employees trained in responsible beverage service within 30 days of receiving a license.
- A "grandfathered" ordinance covering businesses that had alcohol licenses before the conditional use permit ordinance went into effect. "So many

communities struggle with places that have been in business for years," O'Hara said.

Besides supporting the passage of these ordinances, the coalition has served as a watchdog group, making sure businesses comply.

"Ordinances are just words unless they are implemented," O'Hara said.

The group has also helped police carry out decoy programs, in which underage youths without IDs (decoys) attempt to buy alcohol from local businesses. If a decoy makes a successful purchase, police intervene.

**Ordinances
are just
words unless
they are
implemented.**



The youth council is an important addition to the coalition because the group is now shifting its focus to make prevention among young people its No. 1 concern.

Most recently, the coalition has been involved in an effort to close a downtown restaurant that has become a trouble spot.

"It's supposed to be a restaurant, but it's really a nightclub—there's not a lot of eating going on there," O'Hara said. "There have been fights, and neighboring businesses are complaining."

The coalition is urging city officials to take action without waiting for intervention by the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control.

"We'd like to see local government exercise power in this situation," O'Hara said.

In another recent action, the coalition protested a liquor license set to be issued to a mini-mart near a high school.

"The neighbors don't want it, and we can see why," O'Hara said. "The owner wanted us to support the project, but I told him we're not about to support a new alcohol outlet going into town."

The license was denied, but the business owners are appealing the decision to ABC.

Through all their different efforts over the years, O'Hara said the coalition and police have worked well together.

"Prevention efforts have worked alongside law enforcement very successfully.

And the police involved with us have been great at grasping the idea of prevention; they're not just into enforcement."

O'Hara said the coalition has also been successful in bringing together many different types of people to work for the same cause. She is the only prevention professional in the group; the rest are businesspeople or concerned citizens.

"We have different people coming with different points of view."

One of those people is Marie Briggs, who has been a key member of the coalition almost from the beginning. Briggs got interested when she, as an

employee of the city's risk management department, took part in sobriety checkpoints.

"Oxnard has serious issues with youths and alcohol and drugs," said Briggs, who has two children, ages 11 and 18. "We have nonresponsive parents. We need to educate the parents and the kids. The coalition can work on that, and it's instrumental in changing alcohol policy."

Briggs is proud of some of the prevention efforts the coalition has helped, including the closing of one nightclub for repeated fights, public drunkenness and selling alcohol to minors.

"Our group was there when the ABC put the sign on the door," Briggs said.

Briggs has also gotten her 18-year-old daughter involved in the coalition's work. Danielle is president of the coalition's new Youth Council.

Danielle and other council members are currently conducting a survey on underage youths and alcohol. They are asking their peers how they get alcohol and if their parents allow them to drink.

"A lot of parents do," Danielle said.

In addition, members of the council will serve as decoys when police conduct the decoy program.

"I trust my daughter; she doesn't drink or do drugs," Briggs said. "She has a very good group of friends. But she knows young people who do drink."

The youth council is an important addition to the coalition because the group is now shifting its focus to make prevention among young people its No. 1 concern.

Still, O'Hara expects the coalition will remain alert in all areas.

"Oxnard is a very active community, and this is a very active group," she said. "The people in Oxnard all talk to each other. It's hard to pull anything over on them."

For additional information on the coalition call O'Hara at 805/671-5016. ☐



Coalition Members, City Council Members, Law Enforcement Officials, Neighbors show up for the closing of the notorious Pancho Villa Bar.

WARNING LABEL

Children are exposed to an average of 20 different advertising pitches for tobacco products per store.



CAUTION: THIS STORY CONTAINS INFORMATION THAT MAY PERMANENTLY CHANGE THE WAY YOU SEE THE INSIDE OF A CONVENIENCE STORE.

Tobacco advertising may have disappeared from the airways and billboards, but a trip to any local convenience store will reveal a plethora of colorful, catchy ads touting tobacco products. Disturbingly, it is not uncommon to find some of the ads placed near the candy and gum racks and on the entrance door.

Coincidence or clearcut pandering to children?

For antismoking activists in Ventura County, the answer is definitely the latter.

"This sort of marketing to kids started years ago, and because of the tobacco settlement that bans certain types of advertising spots, we're seeing a huge proliferation in the mom-and-pop markets and the gas station mini-marts," said Jeanne Scott, program administrator for the Tobacco Education Project for the Ventura County Department of Public Health.

To help gauge the extent of in-store advertising of tobacco products, Ventura County participated in a three-county survey early this year that sent

54 teenagers to more than 250 markets, convenience stores and gas stations to count the number of tobacco ads in the Tri-County area.

A Santa Barbara-based group called the Tri-County Regional Team organized the survey, which was funded with money from tobacco taxes by the California Department

of Health Services. Called POPTARTS—Point of Purchase Tobacco Advertising Research Team Survey—the project is a partnership of teen volun-

teers and antitobacco agencies around the region. Its purpose is to survey retail stores in the Tri-County area to determine the amount and kinds of advertising being used to promote the sale of tobacco. Since implementation of the Master Settlement Agreement that banned billboard advertisement of tobacco products, surveys have found that the amount of advertising inside and outside stores that sell tobacco has increased. POPTARTS not only gathers point-of-purchase advertising information, but also monitors illegal activities of the tobacco industry, such as continued use of Joe Camel and other cartoons.

In this year's survey teams of youth auditors found that children are exposed to an average of 20 different advertising pitches per store for tobacco products.

In Ventura County, the youth teams canvassed 116 retail outlets in Oxnard, Moorpark and Camarillo. According to the Oxnard and Camarillo tabulations, up to 74 percent of stores near schools, parks and homes had tobacco ads in windows; in Moorpark, the figure was about 40 percent.

In Camarillo, 43 stores were visited, of which 14 had the most ads placed near candy aisles. Ads placed at three feet or less from the floor were found in seven outlets in Oxnard, 11 in Moorpark and seven in Camarillo. Throughout the county, the number of tobacco signs per store ranged from 13 to 18.

Teens who participated in the surveys said they were astounded by the results.

"It was shocking to me that I didn't ever notice it before," said one 15-year-old Camarillo girl who helped in the canvassing. "It made you feel almost angry that [ad placements] were so shamelessly trying to target little kids."

"I learned how much of a target I am," said one 15-year-old student from Moorpark High School.

The benefits of youth advocacy in antitobacco



TOBACCO-CONTROL ACTIONS AROUND THE STATE

Other jurisdictions in California are looking at ways they can use both youth involvement and local powers to curb teen smoking. For example, the Mountain View City Council is considering an ordinance that would ban self-service displays of tobacco products, ban free samples and promotions to minors and require retailers who devote more than 20 percent of their space to tobacco products to get a special permit, except for cigar stores.

Last year in San Fernando, a city of about 25,000 in Los Angeles County, youths involved with a program called Pueblo y Salud, successfully lobbied the city council for a law prohibiting alcohol and tobacco billboards and storefront ads within 1,000 feet of a so-called "sensitive site." Sensitive sites include schools, churches, parks, and residential areas. They also worked to get a law passed requiring licensing of tobacco retailers. Javier Flores, the executive director of Pueblo y Salud, said that this law would have a "tremendous impact on accessibility." The California Youth Advocacy Network is resource for youth involvement in tobacco-control efforts. Funded by Prop. 99 monies, it supports the Statewide Coalition, a network of youth advocates from around California who are changing the social norms regarding tobacco. For more information about CYAN visit its Website at www.ymn.org/.

efforts is noted by *El Concilio*, the largest and oldest Latino advocacy group in Ventura County, and one of the sponsoring agencies that assisted with the convenience-store ad surveys.

Yvonne Guterrez, director of *El Concilio*, said the organization has developed a series of workshops for children in middle school whereby kids learn to write to merchants protesting the placement of tobacco advertising.

Guterrez said some businesses, particularly in the Santa Paula and Fillmore areas, did make some in-store changes after receiving the letters. Some, for example, agreed to place antismoking signs in stores.

"These are good efforts and great opportunities for kids to become involved," Guterrez said. "But there also have to be follow-up measures. There are always new stores and new owners."

Community organization and community mobilization play an important role in these efforts. For example, the Ventura Avenue coalition pressured merchants to remove a significant amount of alcohol advertising from Avenue stores by repeatedly and regularly telling merchants that they were upset with the signage and would shop only at stores that complied with their requests to remove alcohol advertising (see

Prevention File, Ventura County edition, Summer 2001). Their efforts significantly changed the look of alcohol outlets on the Avenue.

The results of the latest survey were not surprising to Scott of the Tobacco Education Project.

Comparable surveys from as far back as ten years ago produced similar findings, she said.

While the store-ads surveys put the spotlight on storeowners, Scott said, "it really needs to be focused on the

tobacco industry and their advertising practices.

"Tobacco is such big business," Scott said, "and the tobacco industry really strong-arms these storeowners through a reward and punishment system."

Scott referred to tobacco distributors paying storeowners "slotting fees" for ad placement within an establishment, a practice that is common throughout the retail world. For many stores, especially the mom-and-pop operations, the fees are hard to resist as they represent substantial revenue. Scott says that lobbying state legislators to ban "slotting fees" might be an option for reducing tobacco promotions.

The Santa Paula Youth Action Task Force has successfully used advertising surveys at alcohol outlets to enlist enforcement of a rule in that city saying premises must not cover more than 20 percent of their storefronts with any type of advertisement, including alcohol ads. Safety is the main reason for this code, so that police officers can see into premises in case there is a problem (see *Prevention File*, Ventura County edition, Summer 2001).

Scott agrees that the participation of teens and even younger children is a very valuable aspect of

the tactic that surveys ad placement in stores.

"Children want to be part of the solution to a problem and to play a leading role," said Scott, who was a teacher for 17 years.

In fact, the youth teams that participated in the surveys plan to ask merchants to voluntarily take down or move smoking ads. They are also taking the survey results to city councils to prompt action in the form of ordinances to regulate tobacco ads and promotion.

TCRT has ordered paper bags with the POPTARTS logo and a slogan that reads: "This store is part of a voluntary merchant program committed to reducing tobacco ads in stores." The *El Concilio* youths are revisiting the same stores that were surveyed in an effort to have them join this voluntary program.

"This program is designed to reach the moral conscience of the store owners. And for those who do decide to eliminate their tobacco ads, we will do everything possible to recognize them, including contacting local media for newspaper and television recognition. It is our hope that if a couple of storeowners commit to this program, then others will follow. Tobacco ads that target kids are unacceptable and I am hopeful that our youth advocates will help these store owners to realize that," said TCRT assistant director Joey Bilotta.

Ventura County Supervisor Kathy Long said she's a strong supporter of the youth group's efforts. "We've seen how the tobacco industry has done things to attract young customers," Long said in *The Los Angeles Times*. "Using teens to reach other teens is going right back at them

with a clever response campaign."

For more information on the county's tobacco-control efforts call Scott at 805/677-5229.

For information on getting youths involved in local efforts call *El Concilio* at 805/486-9777.

For information on the Tri-City Regional Team and POPTARTS project, including specific survey results, visit its Website at www.tcrt.net □

