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# Q&A

## WITH CHRIS ALBRECHT



*Chris Albrecht has been the District Administrator for the State of California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control's Ventura/Santa Barbara/San Luis Obispo District since January, 2005. He has worked for the agency since 1994 in several different District offices and specialize units throughout the State.*

**Q:** When people hear the name Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, they often think of a licensing agency within state government, but your responsibilities are much broader. What other activities do you direct in the three-county District, which includes Ventura, Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo?

**A:** ABC is, in fact, the State Licensing Agency for any kind of alcoholic beverage sale or commercial use within the state. In the tri-county region, we have approximately 3,000 different existing licenses. They consist of everything, from large manufacturing wineries to small family owned stores, restaurants, and bars. Any public or commercial use of alcohol it is regulated by the state, so we do have a big job. In any given year we process between 700 and 800 applications for licensure, either transferring licenses between parties or issuing original licenses for new businesses. Our other primary function is that of enforcing the ABC Act to ensure that the licenses we do issue are in full compliance with state law and regulations.

**Q:** The ABC Act also includes language about the health and welfare of the citizens of California, so is there a public health component to ABC responsibilities?

**A:** Public safety and the welfare and well-being of local communities is, in fact, the basis for ABC's existence. It's our responsibility to ensure that a license issued by us will not contribute significantly to the public detriment, whether it be quality of life issues in a given neighborhood or specific public safety issues such as preventing youth access to alcohol.



One area of focus in Ventura County has been binge drinking in retail settings and over-serving patrons. What problems have you seen in this area and how does your office work with local law enforcement to prevent them?

**A:** We are in somewhat of a unique situation in this district because it is considered to be a tourist area. In addition, we have no fewer than four college settings within the District that lend themselves to that type of drinking behavior, which is a challenge for us. It is something we take very seriously. Over-service and service to obviously intoxicated patrons is something that we are continually working to eradicate. We usually use undercover techniques to work premises where we have a strong indication that that type of activity is taking place. We file administrative accusations regularly against licensees that violate the statute prohibiting service to an intoxicated person.

In the tri-county area right now, there are five dedicated ABC Investigators. But that number is somewhat misleading. A large percentage of our investigation staff throughout the state is now centralized in special programs. Some work out of the Southern California Cerritos headquarters, and although not dedicated to this District, they help out for special needs.

We work closely with local law enforcement officials and have what I feel are very strong relationships with all the local agencies in the District. We depend on them as much as they depend on us to meet the goals of effectively regulating the industry.

When a restaurant or a bar continuously plays outside the rules, what should community members do to address their concerns? Should they start with ABC or the local law enforcement agencies?

**A:** It would depend on the specific problem. Both district offices are available for receiving specific complaints and people can file complaints on the ABC Website, [www.abc.ca.gov](http://www.abc.ca.gov). Those go directly to the Director's office and are then filtered back to the districts. While the majority of complaints come via telephone or from local law enforcement agencies at this point, the percentage of complaints filed online increases every year. At every turn we try to make access to and use of the Department's Website as simple as possible.

Ventura County residents have been hearing a lot recently about local city laws targeting underage drinking parties. What is the relationship between the ABC laws that you typically enforce and the laws that city government may put in place?

**A:** City ordinances and state statutes are working together for the common goal of promoting safety with the use of alcoholic beverages. We work with local agencies to uncover any kind of violations of the ABC Act. The Department's primary purpose in most situations is to regulate the industry; that is where our administrative jurisdiction lies. However, all ABC investigators are sworn peace officers who are able to enforce all the laws of the state of California and local municipal ordinances. Often times state investi-

gators work with local agencies on non-industry enforcement operations, such as sending young looking people into a fraternity party to determine if illegal alcohol sales or consumption is taking place, and then assisting with arrests and seizure of evidence.

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selling a drink at a bar. The law says that any kind of public use of alcohol or any kind of sale, be it actual or included in a ticket or entrance price is, in fact, a sale which requires licensure by the state.

You recently attended a conference in Ventura that focused on municipal strategies for dealing with alcohol problems. What kind of support do you provide to local community groups and agencies in dealing with underage alcohol use?

**A:** The Department does not take a specific position on funding mechanisms for local agencies or cities or counties to gain revenue for addressing alcohol problems. But at the same time, we encourage them to consider any avenue to help them

address what the Department recognizes as a serious potential problem for any community, uncontrolled or irresponsible sale and use of alcohol. We like to think that the Department provides a lot of support even if it can not always do it materially through human resources. For example, we have grant programs for local law enforcement agencies to support the Minor Decoy Program, as well

as basic enforcement grants that the department provides to local cities and counties under its Grant Assistance Program (GAP).

**Special events and alcohol sales in outdoor settings seem to be getting attention for alcohol-related incidents in Ventura County. Are you supportive of community coalitions and neighborhood groups who are concerned about alcohol problems in these settings, and how do your powers and their safety goals match up?**

**A:** Absolutely. We look for input from anyone, including local groups and coalitions, when it comes to whether or not we issue licenses for those types of events. Most often these special event licenses are issued to either licensed alcohol caterers or to registered nonprofit associations or organizations. Many people discount the potential for violation at such fundraising events, but the potential for irresponsible service and dangerous activity at these functions is a genuine concern. The primary policing responsibility of those events usually falls on local law enforcement, so we regularly consult with agencies before issuing those types licenses. For any kind of large event we normally require law enforcement approval on the application

We also require specific conditions on many one-day licenses which place limitations on numbers of beverages sold or containers size or ID checking requirements. We work as closely as we can with the local agencies to get input from them because we recognize that for a Saturday afternoon event in a local park, it will be those agencies' officers who respond to problems.

In order to reduce problems at large events, the local law enforcement agency will often make responsible beverage service training a condition of their approval. Of course, we sup-

port that requirement and do have the LEAD program available for special events. With some notice from a group that they are required to have it, we have a LEAD investigator conduct a condensed two-hour version of the full LEAD training program.

We consider it to be a very effective tool for ensuring that the people that are operating the alcohol sales booth are acting responsibly. It gives a sense of ownership to people and a full understanding of what their responsibilities are. This is especially important as the people selling alcohol at many of these events are volunteers. When they attend this class they are made aware of the fact that handing that beer across the counter is an act for which they can be held criminally and/or civilly responsible. It tends to wake them up a bit.

**Would you say that the Prevention Division of Ventura County makes your work easier and how would you describe your relationship with the Behavioral Health Departments?**

**A:** We have ongoing contact with the Behavioral Department staff to get their input regarding permanent licenses in specific neighborhoods, as well as activities at large, temporarily events. I think we have an open channel of communication and consider the Prevention Division to be a valuable information resource and working partner.

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**What are the biggest challenges facing your office in the next three years?**

**A:** We are routinely dealing with staffing shortages, as are most governmental agencies. And the cost of living has an impact on us in terms of being able to keep people on the job. We have to train new people to fill vacancies. But, specifically I think our biggest challenge will be keeping up with the dedicated effort of enforcement. We have a high demand for licenses with the advent of the

boutique winery industry in San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara Counties. It takes resources to process applications, so it's very challenging to keep enforcement activity a priority. Through the hard work and dedication of our people, though, we've managed to keep up fairly well with the demands of all our stakeholders. We consider ourselves to be valuable partners in the collective effort to keep our communities safe and prosperous. □

# A DECADE OF ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

TEN YEARS AGO the director of alcohol and other drug programs in Ventura County said that he wanted to see something different—prevention activities that had specific, concrete and measurable outcomes in reducing the problems they were trying to address.

“We had about 12 county employees doing prevention throughout the county,” says Kathy Staples. “We had about 32 different programs that were mostly informational and educational in nature. We did classroom presentations, worked with schools and other large organizations, and did parent education. It would have been a very lengthy and costly process to prove that these efforts were effective.” Research shows that educational programs alone are of limited value

Today, Staples is the Division Manager of the Training, Applied Research, Alcohol and Drug Prevention Division of the Ventura County Behavioral Health Department, and looks back on ten years of profound change in the way the county seeks to reduce the cost to society of alcohol and other drug use. What triggered it all a decade ago was the creation of a strategic plan that would shift prevention efforts away from information and education prevention efforts and instead adopt a public health model—one that focuses on the environment which permits a problem to flourish.

“Moreover, the focus was at the community level. We began funding neighborhood/community coalitions. We discovered that community members are eager to tackle community health and safety issues. They are tireless, creative and courageous. They have a lasting commitment because it’s their streets, their parks, their neighborhood . . . and it’s their friends, neighbors and families that are impacted,” says Staples.

Modest planning grants helped community coalitions get started. “Coalitions need seed money, but not huge budgets,” says Staples.

We gave out up to \$5,000 Planning Grants for a six month period. “We learned that training and guidance are much more valuable than a big budget.”

Community groups could qualify for an additional implementation grant of \$50,000 if they met an important conditions. “They had to do local assessments—data collection to identify the problems they wanted to work on, mobilize the community, attend training and develop an implementation plan,” Staples says. A coalition might have been motivated at the start to do something about the threat of illegal drugs. But their assessment might have turned up data showing that far more young people were endangered by alcohol being served indiscriminately at house parties.

“It was sort of a combination of where the data led them and what they felt passionately about,” says Staples. “House parties became a big issue in many communities.” In one community, the data showed that local police had been called 298 times in a three-month period to respond to house parties attended by underage drinkers. The police became enthusiastic partners with parents and others in the community in efforts to nip such parties in the bud.

The county has provided start-up funds to about 30 community-level coalitions over the past ten years, says Staples, pointing out that many coalitions do not seek county funds after several years of implementation funding.

“They receive an implementation grant for up to \$50,000 a year for several years and then say thank you very much, we’re mobilized, we’ve learned a lot, we’re going to keep our eyes open and continue to work to keep our community healthy and safe, and we don’t need funding any more.” This is unheard of with contracts with community based organizations. That frees up the county resource to provide a similar opportunity to other neighborhoods and communities within the county while keeping the



# TO REDUCE ALCOHOL PROBLEMS

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efforts in the communities that have already been funded sustained.

The strategy of collaboration has broadened beyond the community level. The VCBH Prevention Division received a million dollar grant over a three-year period to address underage and binge drinking utilizing a Community Partnership of all county law enforcement agencies, the ten cities in the county as well as the unincorporated area, all of the colleges/universities and community coalitions. The Community Partnership is known as Ventura County Limits and can be accessed via [www.venturacountylimits.org](http://www.venturacountylimits.org).

The Ventura County Limits Law Enforcement Collaborative brings together every law enforcement agency in the County to share data and experiences dealing with underage and binge drinking related problems ( see *Prevention File*, Winter, 2006). The Ventura County Limits Higher Education Collaborative unites all the colleges and universities in the County for the same purpose. The Ventura County Limits Municipal Collaborative hosts Municipal Strategies Conferences to study and implement effective municipal policies to address and prevent underage and binge drinking (see *Prevention File*, July 2006).

The resources of the grant are spread around to increase local capacity and assist with the adoption of responsible policies and practices that have specific, concrete and measurable outcomes. When the Kettil Bruun Society for Social and Epidemiological Research on Alcohol held its 31st Annual Symposium in Riverside in May 2005, 16 community leaders active in the VCL Partnership made the trip to the Inland Empire to learn what are others are doing across the country and around the world when it comes to preventing alcohol problems. And 25 people, including representatives from every county law enforcement agency, several elected officials, a college, community coalitions and

other Ventura County Limits partners attended a recent national conference on underage drinking enforcement in Baltimore, sponsored by the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention held in Baltimore, MD.

One outgrowth of community concern about house parties is widespread adoption of social host liability ordinances—new laws making the hosts of underage drinking parties liable for a \$1,000 fine (see *Prevention File*, Fall 2005). The VCBH Prevention Division contracted with the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation/ Center for Law and Enforcement Policy to develop a Model Social Host Liability Ordinance and Legal Commentary Report which can be accessed through their Ventura County Limits website at [www.venturacountylimits.org](http://www.venturacountylimits.org). As a result, seven of the ten cities in Ventura County now have a social host liability ordinance, and the Board of Supervisors has enacted a similar ordinance applying to all unincorporated areas of the County. Staples said, “Two more cities have ordinances on their agenda. We expect that within six months all ten cities will have a social host liability ordinance in place.”

The County also has used telephone surveys to find out what alcohol and drug issues are creating public concern. Random digit-dial telephone surveys conducted through a contract with a research organization has found that drinking-and-driving and underage drinking and drug use are at the top of the list of concerns.

Staples believes that data-collection is an important new prevention tool. “We’re much more sophisticated than we used to be when it comes to data,” she explains. An important step for Ventura County was development of a “place of last-drink survey” asking people arrested for drinking-and-driving offenses about the circumstances of their drinking and driving directly prior to their arrest and where they had the last drink. Over the last five years the County

has collected data from 9,000 people and has a detailed picture of where problems lie.

"We found that 60 percent of those between the ages of 18 and 25 who had been arrested and convicted of driving under the influence after coming out of a bar, nightclub or restaurant, came out of only 18 establishments," says Staples. "This has major ramifications for community members, municipalities and law enforcement. When those 14 establishments are pressured to change their policies, they can contribute more toward community health and safety rather than detracting from it."

Not surprising, providing responsible beverage service training to people who work in bars and clubs has become a high priority with community prevention leaders. Staples believes server training is an issue that will be getting greater attention from prevention leaders in the future

Who are these prevention leaders? Staples describes a sea-change in the way prevention efforts are conducted. "In the past, the field thought prevention was done best by a few professional preventionists, but now I think there has been a huge paradigm shift and we see that prevention is best done by members of the community." These community members include concerned community members, youth, law enforcement, elected officials, community/neighborhood coalitions, community based organizations, parents, schools, responsible merchants, city planning departments, code enforcement, and college and universities. Policy work is highly effective and needs this sort of diverse collaboration.

Community residents and local law enforcement are natural allies in dealing with alcohol and drug environments. Community members may be reluctant to use a local park because of

alcohol and drug use there and all the associated community-related problems that come with it. So they talk to other neighbors, call the police to respond to incidents they observe or when they see suspicious activity in the park or go to their City Council about their concerns.

When the police develop data on the number of calls for service at the park, the data is very useful in getting the resources needed to clean up the scene at the park. The partnership between the police and the community is critical in addressing these problematic locations.

Those doing prevention work at the community level are becoming more media-savvy, and progress speeds up when newspapers and television stations begin covering prevention issues.

"People hear about these issues, and see an opportunity to be engaged," says Staples. There remains a lot of work to be done, she adds, but it obviously has

become a collaborative effort in Ventura County.

**One outgrowth of community concern about house parties is widespread adoption of social host liability ordinances—new laws making the hosts of underage drinking parties liable for a \$1,000 fine.**



# CAMARILLO,

**FIVE MORE VENTURA COUNTY CITIES** have passed Social Host Ordinance laws aimed at curbing teen drinking parties and fining the people who host them.

The cities of Camarillo, Moorpark, Santa Paula, Simi Valley and Thousand Oaks join the cities of Ojai and Fillmore in restricting such parties and fining adults who allow them to be held on their property. A similar ordinance covering unincorporated areas of the county was also recently passed by the Ventura County Board of Supervisors.

The ordinances are designed to put a stop to what local officials say has been a rising number of loud, unruly parties that have ended up in alcohol and drug overdoses, drinking and driving, sexual assaults and other violence. Such parties, when promoted by email and text messaging, have drawn hundreds of underage youth to often dangerous settings.

The ordinances were adopted after police, concerned parents, elected officials, community coalitions and alcohol and public health experts took a stand against the parties. Ventura County Limits, a project of the Ventura County Behavioral Health Department/Alcohol and Drug Prevention Division, has helped coordinate these efforts countywide.

In Camarillo, the new Social Host Responsibility and Liability law will fine first-time offenders \$500. A repeat offense will carry a fine of \$1,000, and a third offense a fine of \$2,500.

"This allows law enforcement a remedy to deal with these problems that the district attor-

# MOORPARK, SANTA PAULA, SIMI VALLEY AND THOUSAND OAKS PASS SOCIAL HOST ORDINANCES

ney unfortunately doesn't have the time to deal with," Geoff Dean, chief deputy of the Ventura County Sheriff's Department, told the Camarillo Acorn newspaper. "More importantly, it provides a disincentive to host those parties."

In Simi Valley, where a 17-year-old boy was recently stabbed to death at a home party, the City Council voted unanimously to fine adult party hosts \$1,000.

"I don't think we can have laws strict enough when we have young people drinking, City Councilwoman Barbra Williamson told the *Ventura Star* newspaper.

Lt. John McGinty of the Simi Valley Police Department said he expects the new ordinance will add extra muscle to the city's stand against teen drinking parties. Simi Valley has had an ordinance which has allowed police to break up loud parties since the 1990s, but McGinty said the fines that are part of the new ordinance will act as a further deterrent.

Moorpark's City Council voted unanimously to enact a social host ordinance that would allow authorities to cite party hosts with a \$1,000 fine.

According to the *Moorpark Acorn* (Aug. 11, 2006) a council's staff report found that Moorpark authorities responded to 337 calls about unruly, noisy parties last year. Underage

drinking is also linked to nearly half of all teen car accidents, the report stated.

The civil fine imposed against social hosts and landowners will enable Moorpark to recover the costs of responding to problems at gatherings where youth drink alcohol.

Santa Paula adopted its social host ordinance on August 7, 2006. Its City Council appointed an Ad-Hoc Committee to examine a social host ordinance to combat alcohol-related incidents by underage drinkers on May 15. At that time Councilman John Procter said, "A social host ordinance has to do with people taking responsibility for having underage drinkers on their property."

In Thousand Oaks, the City Council voted to penalize first-time offenders \$2,500. Second-time offenders will be fined \$3,500, and third-time offenders \$5,000. Offenders may also be held liable for the city's emergency response costs. There will also be some options for juveniles to perform community service instead of paying the fines, under certain circumstances.

Home parties have been a growing problem in Ventura County for years, but law enforcement has had trouble holding the adults involved accountable because of a gap in the law. That gap has been the "burden of proof" that law

enforcement bears when bringing responsible adults to justice. It is against the law for adults to provide alcohol to minors, but in court, it can be difficult to hold adults responsible unless officers have actually seen them purchasing the alcohol and giving it to minors.

Under the new ordinances, adults who knowingly allow their property to be used as the setting for home parties can be fined, even if they don't actually purchase the alcohol or pour the drinks. Even adults who are out of town at the time of a party could be considered liable if they haven't taken steps to prevent parties where a police response is necessary.

Law enforcement officials in Ventura County say they have had a hard time convincing some parents of teens that home parties can be dangerous. Those parents often consider drinking alcohol to be a rite of passage for teenagers. Believing that such activity is inevitable, those parents think that allowing their teenagers and friends to drink alcohol in a home environment will actually keep them safe.

But statistics show that underage youth who drink are anything but safe. In Ventura County, nearly three in ten (28.6 percent) of those 25 and younger that binge drink reported last doing so in their own homes, and 45.2 percent



# YOUTH DRINKING ORDINANCES SAVE LIVES AND MONEY

In an op-ed article in the *Ventura County Star* (July 18, 2006) Dan Hicks, administrator of the Ventura County Limits project, says that the county and cities enforcing social host laws aren't killjoys. "Instead, these ordinances to deter party hosts from furnishing alcohol to kids will help enforce a critical public safety and health law that's been on the books for a long time — the minimum drinking age. Once it's fully enforced, parents will be more able to protect their children from the most favored and dangerous drug—alcohol."

Hicks points out that kids get alcohol two main ways—"through illegal purchases and through social situations, such as parties. Stopping bars, liquor stores and markets from selling alcohol to kids is very important, but it doesn't address house parties, which are the No. 1 setting for binge drinking and serious assaults among county youth."

"We can reduce the incidence of underage drinking and unruly parties and by doing so, save lives, reduce injuries and violence, protect property and increase the peace of our neighborhoods. And, we can reduce the costs to taxpayers, too" he says, who currently "pick up the tab" for repeated calls for police service.

"Social host ordinances are part of a movement to finally enforce the minimum drinking age and to reduce the threat of alcohol abuse to our children's lives. As raging underage drinking parties become less prevalent because of social host laws and other increased enforcement, the social norm around parties and drinking will change, says Hicks.

For more information on Ventura County limits and Social Host Ordinances visit [www.ventura-countylimits.org](http://www.ventura-countylimits.org).

reported last binge drinking at someone else's home, according to a 2005 telephone survey of county residents. National studies show that alcohol is involved in more teen deaths than all illegal drugs combined. Local statistics reveal that 70 percent of sexual assaults on young women and girls are committed in a home party environment.

Ventura County Sheriff's Captain Gary Pentis said that parents need to understand that teens who drink—even when they are drinking at home—may overdose on alcohol or other drugs, and that alcohol use increases the likelihood of sexual assault or other violence.

Pentis said that when he worked as Chief of Police in Ojai before joining the Sheriff's Department, his officers were responding to four to five calls per month that involved non-lethal alcohol and/or drug overdoses among young teenagers. Those teenagers were sometimes just 13 or 14 years old. The Ojai Police Department had 298 calls for service to respond to teen drinking parties over the course of the summer three months in 2004.

A home party that starts out small with a few

teenagers may grow rapidly into an unmanageable event. Using websites, email and text messaging, teens can alert hundreds, if not thousands, of potential partiers of an upcoming event with just a few keystrokes. That means that many of those who show up for a party may be strangers.

And, studies show, home parties don't actually prevent drinking and driving.

Among young DUI offenders in Ventura County, private homes are the settings most frequently identified as the "place of last drink." The younger the offender, the more likely it is their place of last drink was a private home. In a recent report based on surveys at Ventura County drinking driver programs 78.3 percent of 18 year olds and 72.9 percent of 19 year olds who were arrested and convicted of DUI said that they were drinking at a private residence or home party.

The new Social Host Ordinances adopted in Ventura County are based on a model that was created by the Center for the Study of Law Enforcement and Policy (CSLEP) of the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE) for the Ventura County

Behavioral Health Department /Alcohol and Drug Prevention Division. The goal was to share the model ordinance and legal commentary with local law enforcement, elected officials, and community coalitions so that they might use it in crafting their own ordinance. Calls from around the state and the nation have flooded the County since the report was release. A copy of the model social host liability and legal commentary can be accessed via [www.venturacountylimits.org](http://www.venturacountylimits.org).

The new ordinances call for civil citations and fines rather than criminal prosecution because those cities that have tried criminal prosecution have found them difficult, and some have faced court challenges.

Proponents of Social Host Ordinances are now encouraging passage of such ordinances in the remaining cities in Ventura County. An ordinance is under consideration in Ventura. The idea is to present a united front against teen drinking parties and to prevent teens from outsmarting the law by moving their parties to areas of the county that don't have such rules.

In April, when the county Board of Supervisors adopted its ordinance for unincorporated areas, the Supervisors urged city officials to do the same. Supervisor Kathy Long joined with Sheriff Bob Brooks in issuing a written appeal to city leaders asking them to follow suit.

Meanwhile, seven of the county's ten cities now have the law in place and it is being enforced in those communities that have adopted it. Sheriff's deputies in Ojai responded to two large teen drinking parties in June. At one party where alcohol was being served, there were about 50 young people, ranging in age from 16 to 21. The hosts for both parties were issued \$1,000 citations. To date, Ojai has used its ordinance eight times. □

## CITY OF SIMI VALLEY

