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The High Cost Of Underage Drinking

Under Law, Adults Could Be Held Liable

By COLIN POITRAS
Courant Staff Writer

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Those who think they're doing right by allowing minors to drink in their homes because they can be supervised might want to talk to Stephen Guest.

Two years ago, Guest's 20-year-old daughter, Kristine, died after attending an underage drinking party in upstate New York. She wasn't intoxicated. But the 20-year-old man who was operating the snowmobile she was on was.

The snowmobile hit a rock and both were killed. Guest believes some adults were aware underage drinking was going on at the party and allowed it.

"Those adults are not only making a bad decision for their own kids, they are making a bad decision for other parents' kids and I don't know where anybody has a right to do that," said Guest, who lives in West Hartford.

Guest came to the state Capitol Friday to join two state senators in reminding Connecticut parents of a new law that makes it a crime for people to knowingly allow minors to possess alcohol in their homes or on their property or to fail to make reasonable efforts to stop minors from possessing alcohol illegally.

Sens. Jonathan A. Harris, D-West Hartford, and John A. Kissel, R-Enfield, called the press event because Memorial Day is traditionally the kickoff of the summer driving season and a time when many high school and college students are attending social events at the end of school. Some of them, inevitably, will be drinking and driving.

Harris was one of the sponsors of the underage drinking law, which took effect in October 2006. Kristine Guest worked in Harris' office as a legislative intern while on break from her studies as a junior at Quinnipiac University in Hamden. Kissel is the ranking member of the legislature's human services committee.

"We don't want this Memorial Day weekend to be a memorial service," Kissel said.

Earlier this month, two Portland parents and their 18-year-old son were cited for violating the law after hosting a party in their home. While one of the accused, Laura Kirby, 47, said she did not supply any alcohol and took all of the teens' keys, the decision not to stop others at the party from possessing liquor earned the trio each a \$136 fine.

In Newtown a few weeks ago, a member of the local school board was forced to resign after he was cited for allowing minors to drink liquor at his home after the Newtown High School prom.

While many parents may feel drinking after graduation is a rite of passage that didn't harm them when they were young, Harris said alcohol use among teens has changed dramatically from years ago. Many teenagers today attend parties just to participate in long nights of binge drinking, Harris said. Binge drinking has been linked to blackouts, date rape, car accidents and deaths, Harris said.

"Even though parents think they are providing a safer environment, it has been shown that these situations are potentially more hazardous," Harris said.

The new law also makes it illegal for minors to possess alcohol anywhere, rather than only in public places.

Contact Colin Poitras at cpoitras@courant.com.

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