

## 23 arrested for underage drinking Ridgefield Police break up warehouse party

By Susan Tuz  
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RIDGEFIELD -- Underage drinking parties are nothing new in Ridgefield. For years, the police and parent groups have worked to educate parents and youths about the dangers of alcohol abuse by adolescents.

Despite the warnings, 23 teens and young adults were arrested Jan. 13 after police broke up an underage drinking party at a Route 7 warehouse where the group was allegedly trespassing.

There were 13 people ages 19 and 20 and 10 people under the age of 18 at the party when police arrived at 12:34 a.m.

Police Capt. Steven Brown said the incident was disheartening.

"It is because of the inherent danger in these types of incidences," Brown said Thursday. "We're always concerned about what can happen during and after these parties if these underage drinkers get behind the wheel of a car."

Twenty of the youths were charged with simple trespass. Peter Kweskin, 20, of Old Sib Road, and Kristopher Osborne, 18, of Fairview Avenue, were charged with simple trespass and interfering with a police officer.

They are due in Superior Court in Danbury Jan. 26. Kristopher Lowe, 19, of Byron Avenue, was charged with possession of alcohol by a minor and facilitating the underage drinking party. His court date is also Jan. 26.



Police said Lowe had access to the warehouse but would not say how. The older youths brought the alcohol, which was mostly beer in bottles and cans, according to Brown. But no fake IDs were found so police do not know how they got the alcohol.

Police discovered the party when they saw two people walking next to the warehouse. Kweskin and Osborne ran into the woods, police said. Zeus, the department K-9, tracked them through a wooded area to a swamp where police apprehended them. Police later found 21 others in the warehouse.

Liz Jorgensen, an alcohol and drug counselor, of Insight Counseling in Ridgefield, said Thursday she was not surprised to hear about the party.

"This month when kids are home on college break is a difficult time," Jorgensen said. "Kids coming back together, older kids coming back home used to a little more freedom will instigate parties."

Jorgensen noted that Connecticut has an 8 percent higher incidence in teenage binge drinking than the national average for the same age group in similar per capita populations across the nation. It is no coincidence that Connecticut also has a high per capita income, Jorgensen said. Kids with more discretionary income who aren't supervised in their spending often buy alcohol and illegal substances, she said.

"I'm not saying that is the case of any of the parents of this particular group of youths, but statistics prove this out," Jorgensen said.

With youths embracing an "outlaw culture" as a group, there is no stigma to being arrested among their peers, she said. The culture as a whole is "absolutely accepting and condoning" of alcohol abuse and being arrested for it.

"I feel that many parents in Ridgefield have a very lax and even possibly ambivalent view toward kids drinking," Jorgensen said. "The more kids think parents are looking the other way, the more they're going to act out."

That said, you can be a strict parent and still have your kids act out, Jorgensen said.

"That's what kids do at these ages," she said.

Brown said that in the past there have been burglaries at the warehouse where the Jan. 13 party took place. Police contacted the owner of the warehouse, who pressed charges. Brown would not release the property owner's name.

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