



Post-Prom Party-

Couple Pleads 'Not Guilty' To Alcohol Infractions

BY ANDREW GOROSKO

The Horseshoe Ridge Road couple who received infraction tickets on charges of failure to halt possession of alcohol by minors in connection with a May 5 youth party held at their home following the Newtown High School senior prom have both pleaded "not guilty" to the charges, according to their lawyer.

Danbury attorney Joseph Dimyan said this week that his clients, Thomas Gissen, 50, and Lisa Gissen, 47, of 35 Horseshoe Ridge Road, have mailed to the state notices in which they contest the infractions issued to them by police. The tickets bear a \$146 fine under state law. The case will be adjudicated in court.

Mr Dimyan said that the Gissens would have no direct comment on the matter.

After receiving a complaint about 2:39 am on Saturday, May 5, that a teenage girl had become ill from drinking alcohol at a party that was being held inside and behind the Gissen residence, police responded to the scene and found a gathering attended by between 100 and 150 teenagers. The Gissens' son Teddy attends Newtown High School.

Both Mr Gissen and his wife were home at the time of the party.

In view of controversy surrounding the event, Mr Gissen submitted his resignation as a Newtown Board of Education member on May 9.

In his letter of resignation, which was received by the town clerk's office this week, Mr Gissen states, in part, "In light of recent events and so as to avoid controversy that may otherwise interfere with the [Board of Education's] very important work, I hereby resign my position...effective immediately."

After the post-prom party, police also charged eight youths with possession of alcohol by a minor. Four of those youths were 18 years old; four were under 18. The legal age for alcohol possession in Connecticut is 21. Those tickets bear a \$181 fine.

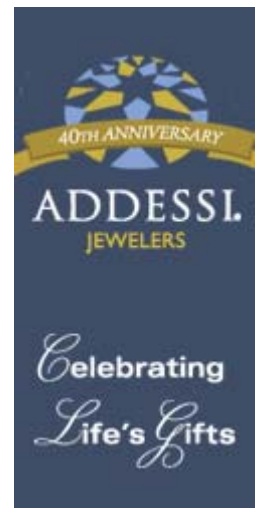
The party was held both inside the house and in the backyard, where about ten tents had been pitched by youths who were planning to spend the night, police have said.

"An exceptionally large amount of alcohol was found in the rear yard of the property in the immediate vicinity of several youths," police have said. The eight youths' proximity to the alcohol resulted in their receiving the infractions.

The backyard held numerous cases of beer, as well as dozens of bottles of hard liquor, according to police. A keg of beer also was found by police.

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Prevention Council



Police Chief Michael Kehoe said this week the investigation into the Horseshoe Ridge Road party remains open.

"There's a few loose ends to tie up, and I'm not going to be satisfied until we've thoroughly investigated it," he said.

Chief Kehoe said the Gissens did not supply any alcohol to the youths who attended the party. The youths brought their own alcohol to the event, the police chief said.

"In this day and age, you have to be so careful," he said. The Gissens were the only two adults at the party, the police chief said.

Invitations for the party billed the event as an alcohol- and drug-free party. However, many more youths than were invited to the party attended the event. The Gissens reportedly took possession of partygoers' car keys after the guests arrived.

Police Sergeant Christopher Vanghele, who supervised the investigation, said that police have the name of a person under age 21 who brought the beer keg to the party on an all-terrain vehicle (ATV). But it remains unclear who purchased that keg of beer, he said. The keg was untapped, the sergeant said.

The approximately 30 bottles of hard liquor found in the backyard were of various sizes, he said.

Police were alerted of problems at the party by an unidentified telephone caller who told them of a sick girl at the event and of the use of an ATV to transport a keg of beer to the party, the sergeant said.

Defense Lawyer

Of the Gissens' party, Mr Dimyan said, "It's clear that they didn't provide alcohol to any people at their gathering ... They did not allow any alcohol."

Mr Dimyan said that uninvited people showed up at the party, leading to problems there.

The lawyer said that the keg of beer that was being transported on an ATV to the Gissen's backyard never actually entered their backyard.

"It's an unfortunate circumstance," Mr Dimyan said of the party's aftermath.

First Selectmen Herbert Rosenthal termed the party "an unfortunate incident."

"[Mr Gissen] did the right thing by resigning," Mr Rosenthal said.

"We can't send mixed messages ... We're not going to tolerate underage drinking," Mr Rosenthal added.

"Tom and his wife are good people, but sometimes good people do things with bad results," the first selectman said. The Gissens are nice people who obviously had good intentions in holding a post-prom party, the first selectman said.

"All of the consequences and ramifications [of the party] may not have been thought through in advance," he said.

The first selectman noted that the high school Parent Teacher Student Association

had put much effort into a sanctioned post-prom party that it held in a controlled environment at the high school. "The PTSA worked very hard on [its] after-prom party," he said.

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