



School Board Member Resigns-

Ten Charged With Alcohol Violations Following Post-Prom Party

BY ANDREW GOROSKO

After receiving a complaint about 2:39 am on Saturday, May 5, that a teenage girl had taken ill from drinking alcohol at a party which was being held inside and behind a home at 35 Horseshoe Ridge Road, police responded and found a gathering attended by between 100 and 150 teenagers.

The party, which was held after the Newtown High School prom, was at the residence of Thomas Gissen, 50, a town Board of Education member whose son attends Newtown High School.

Both Mr Gissen and his wife, Lisa, 47, were home at the time of the party, police said.

In view of controversy surrounding the event, Mr Gissen submitted his resignation as a school board member on May 9, according to school officials.

Following an investigation, police filed alcohol-related charges against ten people.

Mr and Mrs Gissen each were each issued infractions on charges of failure to halt possession of alcohol by minors, police said. The tickets bear a \$146 fine under state law. Such charges are appealable in court. The court answer date is May 18.

Also, police issued infraction tickets to eight teenagers on charges of possession of alcohol by a minor.

Charged with possession of alcohol by a minor were: Amanda Norling, 18, of 4 Marlin Road; Maxwell Reed, 18, of 8 Bankside Trail; Brendan Hintzen, 18, of 15 Main Street; and Jennie Iodice, 18, of 8 Arlyn Ridge Road, police said.

Police also charged four "youthful offenders" with the same alcohol violation. Youthful offenders are either 16 or 17 years old. Their identities are shielded from disclosure by state law.

The tickets that the eight youths received bear a fine of \$181. Such charges are appealable in court. The court answer date for the eight youths is May 18.

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

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

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The backyard held numerous cases of beer, as well as dozens of bottles of hard liquor, police said. A keg of beer also was found and confiscated, police said.

Also, police said they found various drug paraphernalia in the backyard, including pipes used to smoke marijuana. Police pressed no drug charges in the case.

Police Sergeant Christopher Vanghele said four police officers responded to the scene. Police stayed there until 7 am, investigating the case in the affluent Sandy Hook neighborhood.

The sergeant said police called the parents of teenagers who had remained at the party to retrieve their children.

Sgt Vanghele said police were aware of two other post-prom parties in town, but those events did not result in police activity.

Most people attending the Horseshoe Ridge Road party appeared to be Newtown High School students who were 17 or 18 years old, Sgt Vanghele said. "It was one of the larger gatherings that we've had," he said of the scope of the event.

Based on evidence found at the scene, most of the alcohol that the youths had brought to the party was not consumed, the sergeant said.

Although about 75 people were reportedly invited to the party, many more uninvited people attended the event, he said.

Sgt Vanghele said that before the party occurred, Mr Gissen had informed police and informed his neighbors that a party would be held in view of potential parking concerns.

As such, police drove by the area about 11:30 pm on Friday, May 4, to check on the situation, Sgt Vanghele said. The event was a quiet one and no complaints had been received by that time, he said.

"I'm sure it started the right way," the sergeant said, "but it got out of hand. The Gissens didn't do enough to police themselves," he said, adding, "If you're going to hold a party, you have to marshal it."

Police Chief Michael Kehoe said that school-sanctioned activities, such as the post-prom party that was held at the high school, are suitable events for youths to attend.

"We want simple rules followed... Health and safety and control is important... Keeping it smaller is easier to control," he said.

The host of a youth party should ensure that proper conduct is followed at the party for the sake of the guests and their parents, he said.

"We're still investigating it," Chief Kehoe said, adding that more charges could arise from the Horseshoe Ridge Road party.

"We would caution the general public on holding these types of events or gatherings because they are fraught with problems," Chief Kehoe said.