

Mayor targets liquor violations

By Joanna Mallonowski
staff writer

Controlling the sale of liquor to minors is one of Farmington Hills Mayor Terry Sever's priority missions for 1989.

"Aiming for a goal of zero violations of liquor control laws among licensed establishments in the city, Sever is beginning with a series of letters to the 83 licensees and the Michigan Liquor Control Commission."

"I am sending a hard message. I expect to have you (store owners) to have a procedure where people under 21 can't buy liquor. Our goal is working toward no violations," Sever said.

"We will exert whatever pressure is necessary to cause proper observance of the law. We will not tolerate excuses from responsible operators of licensed establishments who are unable to guarantee that minors will not be sold liquor or other spirits," according to Sever's letter.

Letters also will be sent to Patricia Knox, chairwoman of the LCC, and other commissioners urging maximum penalties for liquor law violators. "We call on you to support our effort and revoke licenses from chronic violators to the maximum extent permitted by law."

THE LATEST focus, in conjunction with Farmington Hills Police Chief William Dwyer, stems from

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— Mayor Terry Sever

Sever's disappointment in licensees' poor marks in a series of undercover police cadet operations on the city's licensed establishments.

"I am of the personal opinion that it's disappointing to see we've got more than 50 percent violators in the last couple years," Sever said.

Since October 1986, the police department conducted four undercover liquor law operations. Of 64 establishments checked in the first operation in October 1986, 76 percent, or 49, were cited for violations. Of 34 checked in June 1987, 12 or 35 percent were cited.

The best showing was in May 1988

when 34 establishments were investigated and five, or 15 percent, were cited. In the last undercover operation in November 1988, 20 or 56 percent of the 36 establishments checked were cited.

The city's SDM (beer and wine sales for off-premise consumption) and SDD (liquor sales for off-premise consumption) are performing better in following liquor laws than bars and restaurants, Dwyer said.

Licenses were cited under both the state liquor laws and city ordinances prohibiting the sale of alcoholic beverages to minors.

OF THE 188 establishments checked in the four undercover operations, a total of 175 violations were issued. Of the total violations, 88 were sent to the LCC charging the licensee in general with sale of alcoholic beverages to minors. Three license violations were sent to the LCC for allowing employees 18 years and younger to sell alcoholic beverages. And 66 employees of licensees were issued ordinance violation tickets for furnishing alcoholic beverages to minors.

To date, 90 LCC violations have been concluded with penalties ranging from a \$100 fine to a 10-day license suspension. The average fine was \$300. Sixty-three violations for employees selling to minors have been concluded. Penalties ranged from dismissal to \$100 fine. The average fine was \$50.

"I think the police department will continue these operations," Dwyer said. "We're not out there trying to entrap."

Lubavitch blaze may cost \$500,000

Damage from a fire during religious school at the Lubavitch Center in Farmington Hills could approach \$500,000, Rabbi Berel Shemtov said.

"That's what our insurance adjusters are telling us," Shemtov said.

Farmington Hills fire investigators believe a space heater in the office where the fire started caught a sofa and a stuffed chair on fire about 11:30 a.m. Jan. 6.

About 200 children, teachers and administrators were evacuated after a smoke alarm alerted the caretaker to the fire, in the office wing of the Orthodox Jewish center, 28555 Middlebelt.

Flame damage was limited to the office wing. But there was

smoke damage throughout the cement-block building, which includes a classroom wing, a kitchen and an auditorium.

Some valued books were destroyed in the fire but a computer system was saved.

The day after the fire, classes for the 60 preschool and 40 religious school students were temporarily moved to homes of teachers and supporters and to the Lubavitch Center in Oak Park.

"It's not the best arrangement but the children are adjusting well. The time of learning is more precious to us than the business side," Shemtov said. Shemtov hopes to resume some classes in the Farmington Hills building by February.

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