

UNDERAGE DRINKING FROM PAGE A1

"Everything is pretty accessible on the Internet," he said. Ralph uses a computer scanner he said is similar to those found at the Secretary of State, while his templates were made by a friend.

The seals, however, are where Ralph said he needed to be more creative. He explained that they can't be reproduced exactly, but added that the ones he used were pretty close to the type of seal found on an authentic ID.

According to Ralph, who said he never owned or used a fake ID himself, the new Michigan IDs are easier to make than the old IDs because the details on the news ones are much sharper.

"The problem with making the old ones was that they usually ended up looking too good," he said, explaining that it's easier to make an ID look better than it is to make it look worse.

Ralph and his friends ran the fake ID ring much like a drug operation.

"It works like drug dealing," he said, explaining that only a small number of people had access to him. Those people then acted as suppliers, dealing directly with customers and turning a profit for their services.

"Ninety-nine percent of people didn't know where they were getting the IDs from," he said.

Remaining anonymous was important to Ralph, considering the strict laws and penalties for making, selling and using counterfeit IDs.

According to Farmington Hills Police Chief Bill Dwyer, federal law mandates that "any person who sells or possesses with intent to deliver a reproduced, altered, counterfeit, forged or duplicated license photograph would be guilty of a felony." The penalty for such an act is imprisonment for up to five years and/or a fine of not more than \$10,000.

"I didn't realize (how serious it was) when I first started," Ralph said. "I definitely wouldn't have done it to the extent I did if I would have known then what I do now."

Although he was well aware that what he was doing was illegal, Ralph said selling counterfeit IDs to minors never really weighed heavily upon his conscience.

"It's not like I was giving someone heroin," he said, explaining that alcohol is not as addictive as some other substances people abuse.

Although he never actually got busted for making fake IDs, Ralph said authorities began to catch on once there were so many of his out in circulation.

"I haven't really ever seen a better ID... but it came to a point when there were so many out in the Plymouth, Canton area..." he said. "The first 50 or so were unstoppable but once there were like 900 IDs, that's when it was getting harder and harder to use them."

Ralph justified his business by explaining that many teenagers just wanted the fake IDs so they could go to Canada and dance.

"I didn't rationalize it like it was really doing harm," he said.

cbroda@ec.home.com.net | (248) 477-5450

Teens find alcohol with little trouble



BY GREG MIGLIORE
STAFF WRITER



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Whether they're drinking a bottle of beer in the woods behind their homes or sucking down tequila at a party, teenagers have few problems getting alcohol.

They have older friends or siblings buy for them or sometimes they simply stand outside liquor stores offering extra cash to anyone who will purchase alcohol for them.

Some teenagers also resort to theft. They shoplift or have friends who work at drink-

ing places leave alcohol out with the trash. At places that have kegs, sometimes a full one will get left out with the empties to be picked up later. Some kids also take from their parents' supply.

Teen-agers drink for a number of reasons. They do it to fit in because their friends are experimenting. Some try it out of curiosity and become hooked.

"If their peers are using, this is one way to be connected to them," said Paul Motz, Westland deputy director of Youth Assistance.

Livonia's director, Susan Jimenez agreed.

"The feeling of wanting to belong to something, the kids just feel like they need to fit in," she said.

How kids see alcohol used in their family can impact their views.

"A lot of this can be related to how kids view alcohol use growing up," Motz said.

Teenagers drink at friends' homes, in parks or at parties.

"They'll do it when their parents aren't around," said Dale Yagiela, executive director of Growth Works. "Sometimes the parents will look the other way."

Motz said all kinds of kids drink.

"It can go across the board," he said. "It can be kids that are involved in activities and kids that aren't."

But Motz said the likelihood of drinking decreases if the teenager is involved in something.

Youth assistance programs try to show kids the legal consequences of drinking. They take kids to jails and have them talk to inmates.

Studies show that such programs make a difference. Of the 358 youth who received services for substance abuse in the Conference of Western Wayne, a group of suburban communities, 203 (57 percent) reported progress.

Jimenez said her program gives the names of local groups if kids need to go through therapy. She said because of the high cost, they often go where they are covered by their insurance providers.

"People don't have pocketfuls of money to be paying out for substance treatment," she said.

Westland director Ronaele Bowman said alcohol use can be hard to see.

"Alcohol is so difficult to detect," she said. "Most of the time they aren't going to come into our program reeking of alcohol."

Yagiela said boredom can be an indicator of substance abuse, and parents often do not figure it out for awhile.

He said kids sometimes use for two years before their parents realize it.

"To me one of the classic things is when kids say they're bored," he said.

"When kids are using, they say they're bored. Their parents are usually the last ones to figure out."

Linda Bashor of Redford Growth Works said some parents think drinking is normal.

"Some parents are complacent," she said. "They think it's normal for them to experiment. They don't really look at it as serious until they get into trouble..."

Their kids can show up drunk or high, and they're oblivious."

"Alcohol is so difficult to detect. Most of the time they aren't going to come into our program reeking of alcohol."

Ronaele Bowman
Youth Assistance director

BEING 'LEGAL'

When kids become legal drinkers, problems are still present. Sometimes the very day they become "legal" is the biggest danger.

On their 21st birthdays, many young adults are away at college and face pressure to drink great quantities of alcohol. And since their friends usually are buying their drinks, they see little reason to stop.

Be Responsible About Drinking is an organization set up by the parents of Bradley McCue, a Michigan State University student who died on his 21st birthday from alcohol poisoning.

The group sends cards to students reminding them about the dangers of alcohol poisoning and advising them to celebrate safely on their birthdays.

The program is used at 66 colleges in 24 states, including the University of Michigan and MSU.

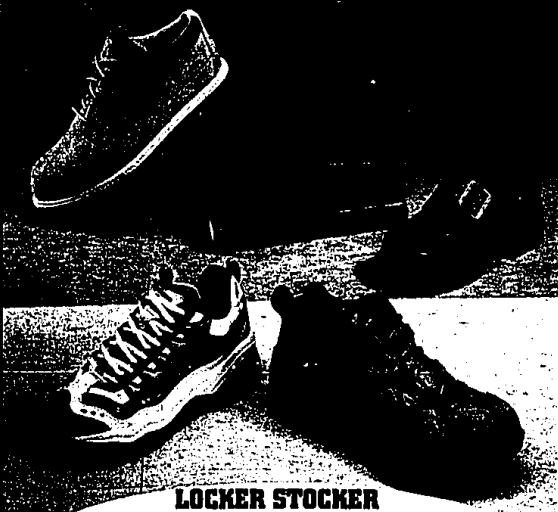
A survey conducted by MSU of its students showed that 80 percent of them had alcohol on their 21st birthday. It also found that 48 percent got drunk.

However, results said that students who got the card from B.R.A.D. were less likely to get drunk and drank less.

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