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Local alcohol providers join ‘We Don’t Serve Teens’ campaign

By Natalie Lester

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Jim Petrone with B&T Distribution Company, a wine and liquor wholesaler, believes the effort to squash underage alcohol sales is working.

“The Knoxville City Police Department used to do stings, where they would go into different establishments with underage cadets who would try to purchase the alcohol,” Petrone said. “To my knowledge, these efforts haven’t been successful in the Knoxville area. I can’t remember the last time a liquor store in the Knoxville area was cited with selling alcohol to minors. That’s the point of this program is to attack it at the point of sale.”

On Sept. 28, the Wine and Spirits Wholesalers of Tennessee (WSWT) announced the partnership with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) on the 2010 “We Don’t Serve Teens” campaign, an initiative aimed at curbing underage drinking through increased public awareness.

Tennessee wholesalers will spearhead the distribution of materials to restaurants and retail wine and spirits outlets across the state. The restaurants and retail outlets will display stickers and posters to remind customers that it is unsafe, illegal and irresponsible to provide alcohol to teens, under any circumstances.

“As an industry we feel it is important to continually remind our customers of the dangers of underage drinking,” said Thomas E. Bernard, WSWT president. “Through continuing our “We Don’t Serve Teens” campaign we are keeping teens and adults educated on the appropriate use of our products and the consequences of misuse.”

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), individuals between 12 and 20 years old consume 11 percent of all alcohol consumed in the U.S, and more than 90 percent of that is in the form of binge drinks. They consume as much as 13.3 percent of all alcohol sold in Tennessee.

Bernard believes that the wholesalers can make a difference and create an atmosphere of understanding and moderation through regulation.

Founded by the FTC in 2007, "We Don't Serve Teens" confronts the problem of alcohol use among the underage population.

According to the most recent data from the U.S. Department of Justice, underage drinkers cost the citizens of Tennessee as much as \$1.7 billion per year.

This translates to a cost of \$2,936 per year, for each youth in the state, and makes Tennessee the 8th highest among the 50 states for the cost per youth of underage drinking.

"The high underage drinking statistics in our state can be lower with continued education," Bernard said. "Our industry is at the center of this fight, and we will continue to use proven initiatives such as 'We Don't Serve Teens' to protect our communities."

The national "We Don't Serve Teens" Week was officially recognized in 2007 by the U.S. House and Senate with the passing of a resolution introduced by the Wine and Spirits Wholesalers of America. "The 'We Don't Serve Teens' campaign recognizes that all three tiers of the beverage alcohol industry play a key role in the prevention of underage drinking, and unites all of those participants in a concerted effort to protect America's youth," the resolution reads.

The campaign is sponsored by a coalition of public and private sector organizations. For more information, those interested can visit www.dontserveteens.gov.