

EDITORIAL

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Charles Washington
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Larry J. Jackson, Sr.
Editor

Gary Ann Taylor
Business Manager

Joy Ramos
Copy Editor

Mark Washington
Distribution Manager

Heather Fairchild
Graphic Designer

Tony Washington
Director of Advertising

Contributing Writers:
Richard Luccetti
Lee Perlman,

4747 NE Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.,
Portland, Oregon 97211
503-288-0033 • Fax 503-288-0015
Email: Pdxobserv@aol.com

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THANK YOU FOR READING THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Alcohol Awareness And Underage Drinking

GUEST OPINION BY BARBARA CIMAGLIO
DIRECTOR OF THE ALCOHOL AND DRUG
ABUSE PROGRAMS

Alcohol abuse has been called "the most intractable problem among youth."

Surveys, statistics and events such as the riot at Seaside at the start of spring break, bear that out over and over. And it's not a big surprise. Alcohol is heavily advertised, easily available, inexpensive, and too often seen by young people as just a fun thing to do.

A 20-year-old was quoted in The Oregonian after the Seaside incident as saying people come to the coastal city "to drink, have fun, meet girls and get in fights."

Also, parents too often say they are relieved to find out their son or daughter is only drinking beer, and not using drugs. Alcohol is a drug, and alcohol abuse can lead to consequences as serious as using other drugs.

Too many young people are taking the drinking problem further by binge drinking, having more than five drinks in a sitting. Binge drinking

among college students has reached epidemic levels, and has resulted in several highly publicized deaths.

It seems almost unbelievable, but more than 60 percent of male college athletic team members and more than 40 percent of female team members reported binge drinking within two weeks of a recent national survey. Those are frightening numbers by any standards, and should be a wake-up call to college administrations, students and their parents.

Gov. John Kitzhaber has proclaimed April as Alcohol Awareness Month in Oregon. Alcohol Awareness Month is an annual event during which prevention and treatment experts, and concerned citizens, do their best to increase public awareness of the dangers of alcohol abuse.

This year's national focus is on reducing binge drinking, and here in Oregon we're asking people to help reduce all underage drinking.

The governor recognizes the importance of reducing alcohol abuse, and specifically has made a reduction in underage drinking one

of his priorities.

Like its partner in crime, tobacco, alcohol is a devastation drug problem in Oregon. Both are insidious, addictive drugs that are advertised as ways to help us relax and enjoy life. In some ways, alcohol can be more sinister because its short-term effects can be so sudden and destructive. Alcohol impairs driving judgement, wreaking havoc on our highways. Nationwide more than 2,300, or about 40 percent, of the motor vehicle crash deaths among youths 15 to 20 years old were alcohol-related. Often the victims of alcohol-related crashes are innocent drivers and passengers in other vehicles.

Any family with an alcoholic knows well how quickly alcohol can destroy the entire family because of stress induced by the alcoholic's lack of ability to control his or her life.

It will take a major change in our culture to have a significant impact on the alcohol problem. For example, we need to make it socially unacceptable to drink in connection with sports and music events, especially where

children are present, and we need to stop access to alcohol by anyone under 21.

You can help.

If you're a parent, set a good example and talk to your kids. If you use alcohol, drink in moderation and explain to your kids the importance of responsible drinking and that underage drinking is unacceptable.

And, parent or not, you can help reduce underage drinking by supporting efforts by local coalitions, schools and law enforcement officials. If you see a minor with alcohol, report it, and talk to your friends about the need to stop kids from getting alcohol.

Information is available from many sources about how to help. Call the Oregon Prevention Resource Center in Salem at 1-800-822-6772. And if you know someone who needs help with an alcohol problem, call the Oregon Partnership at 1-800-923-HELP.

Barbara Cimaglio is director of the state Office of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs in the Department of Human Resources.

Tobacco-Prevention and Education Efforts

GUEST OPINION BY ELINOR HALL
ADMINISTRATOR OF THE HEALTH DIVISION

For people who want kids to grow up smoke-free, the statistic was as troubling as it was startling. It showed that, as early as 1991, 6-year-old children could identify Joe Camel as readily as Mickey Mouse. Worse, they identified "Old Joe" with tobacco.

Now, however, we also have good news on the tobacco-recognition front. In the first two years that the state Health Division has run ads warning of tobacco's dangers, we've found that 74 percent of adults and 84 percent of teens recall one or more of them. This is a phenomenally high rate of recall.

The ads include the billboard in which one cowboy says to the other, "Bob, I've got emphysema," and a TV ad about a woman who, because of throat cancer, now smokes through a hole in her throat.

Using new tobacco-tax revenues from voter-approved Measure 44, the state is spending less than \$2.5 million a year on advertising. This is a lot of money, to be sure, but it is dwarfed by the tobacco industry's estimated \$60 million annual promotion budget in Oregon.

We have a lot more work to do to stop what Oregon physicians say is responsible for more than 6,600 deaths annually (the population of Lincoln City on the coast). About one in four Oregonians smoke, including an estimated 60,000 children and teens.

Here's some of Oregon's progress in the past two years:

• 35,000 fewer Oregonians are smoking.

• Oregon's annual tobacco consumption is down 500 million cigarettes, or about 11 percent.

• 600 lives and \$150 million a year will be saved in Oregon's future for each year this reduction is sustained.

What is behind these results? Besides the advertising people in all 36 counties have formed tobacco-free coalitions.

In Josephine County, for example, coalition members distributed materials at the annual Boatnik parade. Clackamas County published a guide to smoke-free restaurants. Benton County defended a new no-smoking ordinance for worksites and indoor public places. Douglas County developed information for restaurateurs wanting to go smoke-free.

Wasco-Sherman honored a local billboard company for not accepting tobacco advertising. Deschutes County produced a local TV show called "Smoking: Truth or Dare." And several coalitions sponsored appearances by former Winston cigarettes model David Goerlitz.

Across Oregon, students in 57 school districts are receiving a comprehensive program that includes a prevention curriculum, school policies, family involvement, staff training and help to quit.

An amazingly high number of smokers, 75 percent, say they want to quit. The tobacco Prevention and

Education Program will help them. Part of tobacco-tax revenue is being used for a toll-free "quit line": 1 (877) 270-STOP. The line received 1,500 calls in January alone.

Only a few days ago, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued the first national scientific review of Oregon's effort. The CDC concluded that Oregon's successes come from a combination of these stepped-up efforts to make the

public aware of tobacco's hazards and an increased tobacco tax. It called Oregon's program a national model.

Although the manufacturer agreed to stop using Joe Camel to promote smoking, the well-advertised figure will undoubtedly long be a recognized tobacco icon.

We seek recognition of a different sort: to ensure that Oregonians who don't smoke know it pays not to start; that Oregonians who do smoke rec-

ognize the deadly consequences; and that Oregonians who want to quit understand that help is available.

Elinor Hall is administrator of the Health Division in the Oregon Department of Human Resources, the state's health and human services agency. If you want a copy of a fuller report about Oregon's Tobacco Prevention and Education Program, write Hall at 800 N.E. Oregon St., No. 21, Portland 97232.

Letter To The Editor:

April is National Alcohol Awareness Month, sponsored by the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence. The Oregon Liquor Control Commission joins with NCADD to focus attention on underage drinking and binge drinking in Oregon and across the nation.

How often have you heard this: "Why the concern? What's the problem? Kids will be kids. They're gonna try alcohol. I did, and I turned out okay."

If your kids are drinking, they're probably drinking to get drunk. According to a 1998 survey of 50,000 students by University of Michigan scientists, one-third of high school seniors reported being drunk at least once during a 30-day period.

Why be concerned? Alcohol-related traffic crashes are the second leading cause of teen deaths. Alcohol can also be linked to teen deaths by drowning, accidents, suicides or homicides.

Another survey tells about 9.5 million Americans, between the ages of 12 and 20 who had at least one drink last month. A little more than half of those surveyed were self-described binge drinkers consuming five or more drinks in a row on a single occasion.

What you can do about underage drinking. We need the help of all adults - parents, teachers, coaches, health professionals, clergy - to inform young people about the dangers of underage and binge drinking. Most young people don't know that you can over dose on alcohol just as easily as you can on other drugs.

We ask adults to underscore the value of abstinence for kids. Many kids have not learned techniques or answers to withstand the pressure of friends to drink alcohol.

We urge adults to explain to young people of legal age how to use alcohol moderately as a complement to a meal and at social gatherings or celebrations. Many don't know that a 12-ounce can of beer has the same amount of alcohol as a shot of whiskey or a 5-ounce glass of wine.

Our goal is to help create a healthy alcohol-free adolescence for every child in Oregon. If we pay attention now, we may not have to pay later for enormous and staggering social, economic and health costs caused by the early use of alcohol.

Shirley Hassberger, OLCC Regional Manager, Portland 503-872-6394



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