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CHI: Giving teens booze is no treat

Thinking about sneaking a teenager you know a few brews to help celebrate Halloween? Members of a community health group hope folks pondering that possibility will think twice this weekend if they stop in local liquor stores.

By: **Mike Longaecker**, The Republican Eagle

- PHOTO: Delivering Sticker Shock

Red Wing High School senior Hayden Swanson and junior Sierra Furlong (background) apply stickers Friday to beer cases at Red Wing Liquor. The activity was part of the Goodhue County Chemical Health's Sticker Shock campaign, aimed at reducing the number of adults providing alcohol to minors. Students fanned out Thursday and Friday, where they placed about 400 stickers on multi-packs of alcohol at each establishment. -- R-E photo by Mike Longaecker

Thinking about sneaking a teenager you know a few brews to help celebrate Halloween?

Members of a community health group hope folks pondering that possibility will think twice this weekend if they stop in local liquor stores.

Scores of alcoholic beverages at local establishments were slapped this week with stickers warning customers of the risk behind providing alcohol to minors.

The effort is part of the Goodhue County Chemical Health Initiative's Project Sticker Shock program.

"We want to change the mindset and to get adults to be thinking differently," said CHI initiative coordinator Stacy Larson.

The sticker spells out the penalty in no uncertain terms: Purchase or provide minors with alcohol, and you could face $2,500 in fines, a year in jail and a yearlong driver's license suspension.

Red Wing police Chief Tim Sletten said the message is as much a reminder as it is a warning. While some adults will outright provide minors with booze, he said others provide it unwittingly when minors raid refrigerators and liquor cabinets.

"You buy it, you take responsibility for it," Sletten said.

Members of the local CHI group fanned out Thursday and Friday to establishments in Red Wing and Hager City, where they applied the stickers to multi-packs of alcohol. The group included several Red Wing High School students.

While the direct message is aimed at adults, the project's goal is broader. CHI leaders said they hope the program reduces underage drinking — a problem Red Wing High School teacher Lisa Hanson said is significant.

Over the last two years Hanson, the school's health teacher, has witnessed five high school students go through substance abuse treatment. All were younger than 16, she said.

"We obviously have an issue in Red Wing with alcohol," Hanson said.

According to CHI survey data, alcohol is the No. 1 drug of choice among Goodhue County youths.

Teens gravitate toward flavored drinks — like Mike's Hard Lemonade or Sublime alcoholic beverages — that she said are easy on the lips and marketed toward young people.

"They're drinking it like pop," Hanson said.

That makes life a little harder to navigate as a teen, some students said.

Red Wing High School senior Grady Nelson said he’s had friendships dissolve over alcohol use.

“That really sucks,” Nelson said. “I don’t have a whole lot of respect for kids who go out and get trashed on the weekends.”

Participating establishments in Project Sticker Shock are the Harbor Bar, Woodshed Bar, Rivertown Liquors, House of Wines, Liquor King, MGM, Red Wing Liquor and West End Liquors.