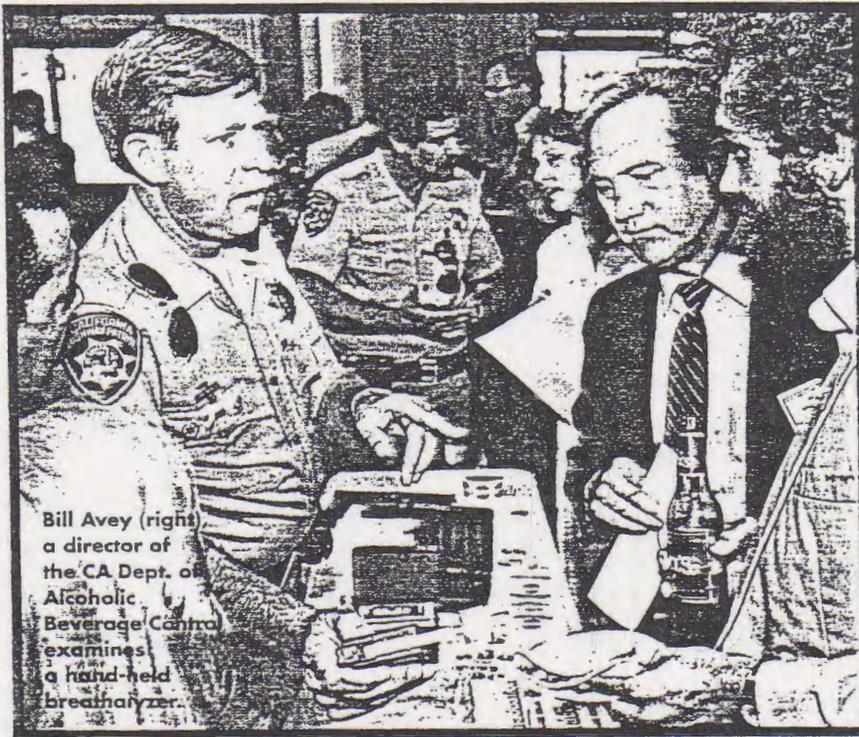




## Responsible Hospitality Councils Proactive Decade



Bill Avey (right), a director of the CA Dept. of Alcoholic Beverage Control, examines a hand-held breathalyzer.

**Operators, distributors, and community leaders ban together to combat drunk driving through responsible beverage service.**

By James Peters

To be successful in the 1990s, the foodservice industry must assume a leadership role in addressing public concerns by accepting responsibility and becoming involved with the community. This will truly be the proactive decade. In the 1990s, responsibility for policy making must be shouldered at the community level. Today, it's the small, independent operator working through the town or city council who will influence the rules and regulations governing business. Owners and managers must free up more time to participate in community activities if they want to establish a meaningful presence in the policy-making process. Cooperation in Responsible Hospitality Councils (RHC) is one way this can be achieved.

Until recently, however, cooperation has been rare. For instance, neither the Presidential Commission on Drunk Driving nor the Surgeon General's Workshop on Drunk Driving invited a representative from the retail beverage service industry. In fact, the National Coalition Against Impaired Driving, a group established as an outgrowth of the Surgeon General's Workshop, specifically prohibits industry membership in its bylaws.

Yet research shows that between 40% and 60% of convicted drunk drivers had their last drink in a commercial drinking establishment, and servers are in an obvious position to prevent customers from driving while impaired. Excluding the industry from the process of program and policy formation disregards the potential impact the industry could have.

The bellweather state of California has been early on the scene to establish cooperative, problem-solving relationships, and the California Restaurant Association (CRA) has lent its support to the "proactive" side of responsible beverage service, says Paul McIntyre, executive director of the San Diego Chapter of the CRA. In 1990, five counties in California decided to break with tradition and involve the industry in

efforts to reduce the rate of high-risk drinking. Forming Responsible Hospitality Councils or Coalitions, representatives from the hospitality industry, law enforcement, citizen groups, regulatory agencies, insurance companies, beverage wholesalers and producers, and health agencies meet regularly to develop new community standards on hospitality.

The impetus for these groups grew from a federally funded research project conducted in 1988-89 in Santa Cruz and

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owners who participated in the program, he began to see the potential.

Going to RHC meetings introduced Avey to many other sectors of the community, and not only was he able to learn of the special interests and problems of the various groups involved, but he also had an opportunity to educate them about the ABC.

As far as reducing liability, Avey will strongly encourage businesses to join the council, participate in the hospitality seminars, and support the covenant.

**HOSPITALITY SEMINARS.** Vince LaRocca, owner of Viva Enterprises in Monterey (consisting of several local cafe-bars) and a member of the RHC-Monterey County, had developed beverage-service policies for his business. Later, he wanted to create a community initiative, and is excited to see others pursuing the same goal.

LaRocca believes the industry needs to "get out of the tunnel-vision mentality long enough to look at the total picture, and not just focus on its own business. The hospitality industry has to move into a position of being more

responsible, moving away from excessive alcohol sales. It is inevitable that business is going that way, and it would be foolish not to see it."

LaRocca also sees the role of the industry as an educator. "Sometimes customers do not understand the risks of excessive drinking. They need education about how to have a good time without becoming intoxicated." LaRocca is one of a growing number of owners who requires staff to attend the hospitality seminars being offered through the RHC.

Bill Cheeseman, director of vocational programs for the San Diego Community College District, believes that the role of the server is to oversee the safety of the guest. While many may view the growing number of alcohol-awareness programs as part of the anti-alcohol movement, Cheeseman sees them as just part of an effective safety-management program.

In addition, hospitality seminar programs need to provide information to both managers and staff on how to respond to changes in the marketplace.

According to recent Gallup polls, 44% of the American public report they abstain from drinking alcoholic beverages, up from 29% in 1976. The successful hospitality establishment will have to create a menu of beverages that appeals to this new market, while effectively marketing these products.

**THE NEW DECADE.** For Barbara Ryan and Richard Burhenne, both of the San Diego County Division of Alcohol Services and members of the RHC-San Diego County, the difficult part was getting everyone to sit around the same table. But, according to Ryan, "Once we did that, and the industry saw this was not a vendetta against them, I knew the project would be successful."

Although Burhenne was skeptical, and thought the process would take longer, he was surprised at how interested the industry was in the project. He can also see how, by having the leaders of the industry involved first, helping people change the way they think about drinking, the problems that need to be regulated will be more obvious.

In Gallup, NM, which was recently portrayed on ABC's "20/20" TV show as "Drunk Town U.S.A.," the community has organized the Responsible Hospitality Council of Gallup to change this image.

Gary Tomada, president of the Gallup McKinley County Liquor Retailers Association, and cochair of the RHC-Gallup, believes his association "always seemed to have a problem with credibility in regard to how to deal with alcohol abuse problems. With the advent of a responsible hospitality program, we finally will have an agenda and a definite set of guidelines."

McIntyre of the CRA best sums up the attitudes of those involved in the project: "These proactive approaches aren't typical for trade associations, where opposition often overrides advocacy. But in matters of health, I think the time has come when our patrons expect us to be at the head, not the back, of the pack." **RB**

*James E. Peters is the founder and president of the Responsible Hospitality Institute, with offices in Massachusetts and California.*



Cheers! Creative nonalcoholic drinks please the eye as well as the taste buds.

## Operators must participate in community activities if they want to influence regulations and maintain their local presence.

Monterey counties. The purpose of the project was to evaluate the effectiveness of responsible beverage service training in reducing the number of intoxicated guests. Ted Burke, owner of the Shadowbrook Restaurant in Capitola and incoming president of the California Restaurant Association, was instrumental in getting the project off the ground.

Says Burke, "The restaurant industry is responsive to the marketplace, and with a little prompting will provide responses to the preferences of its patrons and the community, without the need for government intervention."

**FRUSTRATION.** Burke's interest in helping to establish the Responsible Hospitality Council of Santa Cruz County came from his frustration in working with bureaucratic organizations. He explains, "By bringing everyone around the table, getting them to talk with each other, and having them focus on workable solutions, finger pointing and blame can be eliminated."

Problems caused by high-risk drinking involve all sectors of the community, not just licensed businesses. Burke believes that by involving all groups, and developing programs for all hosts, the industry is not viewed as the problem, but rather as part of the solution.

In addition, says Elizabeth Stanley, administrator for the Monterey County Health Department's Division of Alcohol Programs, "Building bridges of communication among all groups is the only way our community can effectively address health and safety issues."

Once a community decides to establish a Responsible Hospitality Council and recruits representatives, the next step is getting the group to focus on establishing new voluntary standards for responsible hospitality. Creating a "community covenant" is one way of getting everyone to direct their efforts

at a common goal.

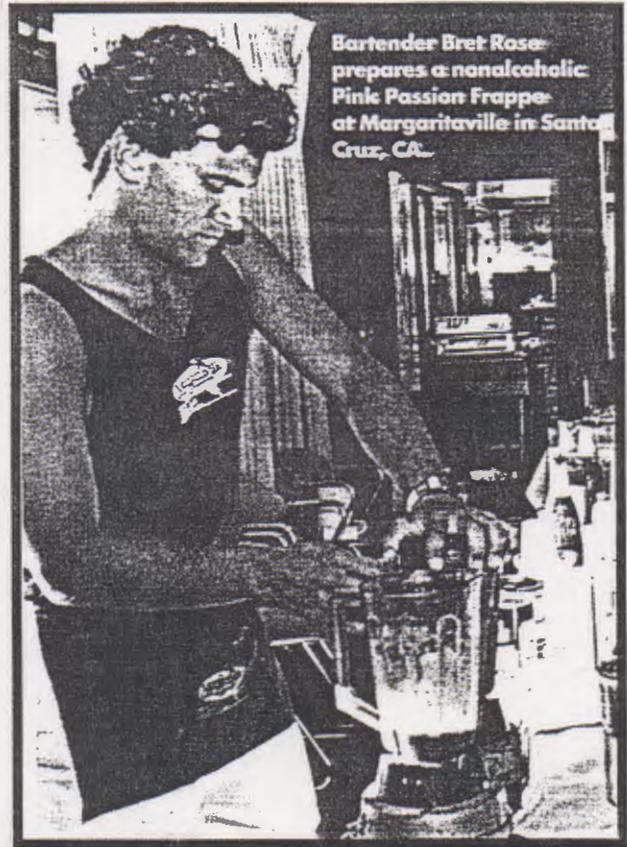
The Responsible Hospitality Councils in Monterey, San Diego, and Santa Cruz counties collectively created a community covenant, which was adopted in all three counties. Through a series of discussions and debates, it was decided that the covenant should emphasize three major points:

The importance of the hospitality industry to the community; the social value of the appropriate use of beer, wine, and distilled spirits; and recognition of the role the host, both social and commercial, plays in creating a social rather than drinking environment.

The covenant also prescribes general practices a host should follow when creating a responsible hospitality environment, including offering no/low alcohol beverages, food, and nondrinking activities, as well as denying service to underage or intoxicated persons.

**INSIDE OUT.** Ed Lacy, a member of the RHC-San Diego, and a representative of the National Council on Alcoholism, has worked with those professionals from the alcoholism treatment community. He believes the value of the council and the covenant is that it will lead to change by educating "from the inside out."

He adds, "Involving the industry in the process of education, rather than just telling it what to do, will let operators know they can play a major role in the socialization of the general community." Lacy believes that by becoming an educator of the public, the industry



Bartender Bret Rose prepares a nonalcoholic Pink Passion Frappe at Margaritaville in Santa Cruz, CA.

becomes part of a "we" program, teaming together with the society at large.

McIntyre of the CRA adds that such an attitude is not inconsistent with the industry's interest in making a profit. "Now that the process has begun, I am convinced we can practice more responsible beverage service while maintaining or even improving profits."

Beyond just protecting public health and safety, and improving profits, many agree that the Responsible Hospitality Council can address issues of liability and create positive incentives for the industry to participate in the program.

Bill Avey, regional director of the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) for Santa Cruz and Monterey counties, admits to being skeptical at first. "During my 27 years as a law enforcement agent, I have seen many programs attempt to deal, most unsuccessfully, with the alcohol issue." Once he began to get positive feedback from licensed business

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