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YTF sponsors social host program on liability

By Lauren Folino
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The Dukes County Health Council's Youth Task Force (YTF) will host a program Monday, June 8, to discuss social host liability, the legal term that describes the criminal and civil liabilities that apply when a host furnishes alcohol to a guest.

Attorney Mark J. Hoover, a 1983 Martha's Vineyard Regional High School graduate, will speak about the law, in particular the consequences when adults furnish alcohol to minors, or host events where minors consume alcohol.

YTF coordinator Theresa Manning said parents and young adults need to be aware of the risks of underage drinking. "The primary point of access for alcohol on Martha's Vineyard is parents' liquor cabinets," she said.

In some cases, Ms. Manning said, parents knowingly provide alcohol under the mistaken belief that it is safer to have their kids drink at home, as long as the parents hold the car keys. She said parents must consider the legal and civil consequences, which may be considerable.

In a telephone conversation with The Times Friday, Mr. Hoover explained why it is important for parents to know the potential risks of supplying alcohol to minors.

Mr. Hoover provided an example of where parents might cross the line into personal liability. "If you're at home with your children and you're having a spaghetti dinner and you offer your child a glass of wine, that is not going to be a violation of the social host liability statute," he said.

"If your teenager brings her friend to dinner, same dinner, but this time you offer the friend a glass of wine, that would be a violation of the social host liability statute. It's a fine line."

Mr. Hoover said that although the program is directed at adults, a portion of the program describes the ramifications if a student is arrested for underage drinking. For example, it may affect participation in athletics, college applications, and job applications.

Mr. Hoover works in the Boston law firm of Campbell, Campbell, Edwards, and Conroy. Attorney Richard P. Campbell designed the program to inform parents, students, and teachers about the social host law following a serious case.

Mr. Campbell represented Ruth Langemann in the 1986 Massachusetts Supreme Court case Langemann v. Davis. Ms. Langemann suffered serious injuries after being struck by an underage drunk driver, Darren Hathaway, who was driving home from a party at a friend's house. The friend's mother, Margaret Davis, was the homeowner, and though she allowed her daughter to have a party, she was unaware that alcohol was present.

Attorney Campbell argued that the homeowner is responsible for injuries caused by a drunk driver who consumes alcohol at their house, whether or not the homeowner is aware that there is alcohol present.

The program begins at 7 pm in the high school library.

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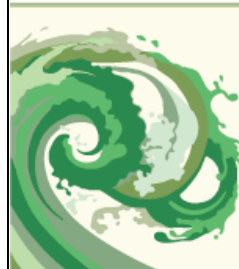
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