

Volume 10 Number 10 October 8, 2008

## Parents/hosts now liable for underage drinking in Zion

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Parents and other responsible adults are now liable in the City of Zion if they permit underage (under 21) drinking on their property. The Zion City Council approved a new ordinance Tuesday giving police the power to charge and prosecute adults for allowing underage drinking in their home and on their property.

Zion Police Chief Larry Booth said the Lake County police chiefs have been working on getting communities to pass this ordinance since the tragedy in Deerfield when two teens died in a car crash and three were injured after attending a party where the parents permitted underage drinking.

As a result of that tragedy, state law increased the penalty to one to three years in prison and up to a \$125,000 fine for parents who knowingly allow underage alcohol consumption in their home and the drinking leads to serious injuries or death.

The local ordinance would allow police to prosecute adults before a tragedy occurs. The ordinance expects parents and other adults to take reasonable steps to prevent underage drinking. These include verifying the age of those attending, supervising the activities of minors at the event and calling for police assistance if someone under 21 is in possession of alcohol. Parents can also notify police if they are going to

be away from home and no one underage is allowed to be present or consume alcohol on their property.

Police Chief Larry Booth said the intent is not to arrest parents but to prevent tragedies like what happened in Deerfield.

Healthy YOUTH from Zion-Benton Township High School also threw their support behind the ordinance. The students were attending another meeting and were unable to be present at the city council meeting, but their advisor Deb Will spoke on their behalf. She said Healthy YOUTH members want the city to support students who choose to be drug and alcohol free and to hold the parents who allow underage drinking

accountable.

Mayor Lane Harrison said as a former teacher he was aware of notes being passed among students announcing "\$1 parties" at someone's house. He said the teens would pay \$1 to get in and then had access to whatever was there, alcohol and or drugs. "In the past there were no teeth for police to hold the owner or adult responsible."

The city council also amended its towing regulations. Police may now charge an administrative fee of \$250 per vehicle for tows resulting from serious criminal or DUI offenses. The fee does not apply to traffic accidents or break downs.

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