

TAHLEQUAH DAILY PRESS

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Local group aims to bolster host ordinance enforcement

By BOB GIBBINS

Local law enforcement officers learned Thursday about state liquor, tobacco and gambling laws at a class sponsored by a group whose target is substance abuse prevention.

Tahlequah BEST (Building Everyone's Strengths Together) offered the class to officers at the Armory Municipal Center. The group aims to combat underage drinking, tobacco usage and gambling.

"This is a small part of our enforcement," said BEST Coordinator Val Dobbins. "We also want to control access to alcohol, tobacco and gambling [for those who are underage]."

Pete Heist, agent with the Alcoholic Beverage Laws Enforcement Commission and a co-chair of the Tahlequah BEST group, was instructor for the class, which allowed the officers to obtain Council on Law Enforcement Education and Training credit. Commissioned law enforcement officers are certified through CLEET.

During much of the morning part of the session, Heist explained the state statutes covering liquor laws. Heist said the statute on social hosts has two parts, and pointed out Tahlequah's city government has an ordinance.

Dobbins said the city council passed the ordinance in May 2006 after it was proposed by the 2Much2 Lose students.

"It's never been enforced," she said of the ordinance.

Dobbins said the prevention program has also been expanded into the local school curricula.

"All of these issues have an effect on the community," Dobbins said. "We look at what we're doing as a comprehensive community approach to substance prevention."

Heist said officials are working to get the ordinance included as part of the municipal code so the city's code enforcement officer can issue citations for social host violations.

"We want to enforce it and publicize the enforcement really well in hopes that it cuts the number of people hosting parties where minors are consuming alcohol," he said.

The Tahlequah ordinance makes it the duty of the person having control of the premises to take all reasonable steps to prevent the consumption of alcohol by anyone at the gathering.

Violators may be fined \$500.

Dobbins provided survey results to those at the class, showing just under 30 percent of Tahlequah High School 10th-graders admitted they have consumed alcohol, and nearly 15 percent admitted binge drinking.

Those numbers grow to just under 40 percent of THS seniors having consumed alcohol and a little more than 30 percent admitting to binge drinking.