

Liquor sale violators get warning

By Jeff Gilbride/Daily News staff

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WALTHAM - Five businesses were let off with a warning by the city License Commission last night after they were caught serving alcohol to minors.

Representatives of The Green Tea House at 154 River St., Margarita's at 211 Moody St., The Wine Cellar at Silene at 475 Winter St., the Westin Hotel at 70 Third Ave. and Veronicas at 1074 Main St., appeared before members of the commission and Waltham Police Lt. Steve Champeon last night to discuss the results of a police sting on the night of Nov. 26.

That night, Waltham Police took part in the "21 means 21!" campaign organized by Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

Police sent underage students from local colleges and M.A.D.D. volunteers into 77 establishments in Waltham to order beer between 7 p.m. and 10 p.m.

A bartender at Margarita's served alcohol to both a 14-year-old girl and a 16-year-old girl during the sting, according to Champeon.

"(The bartender) is not here. He was actually fired on the spot," said Margarita's general manger Lanora Brooks. "He was actually very upset ... it's just something we don't tolerate."

Members of the commission said Margarita's had an "impeccable" reputation but questioned Brooks about the bartender's age, saying they believe at age 22 he may have been too young to serve minors.

"In my experience 75 percent of the problems we have are because the bartenders are under 25 years old," said commission member Robert Hardiman. "An experienced person I think would have been more likely to (ask for identification)."

Amy Horsik, a bartender at The Green Tea House, told members of the commission she believed the 18-year-old girl she served during the sting was part of a group of people she had already carded.

"I've been a bartender for 20 years ... this is the first time this has happened," she said. "I feel terrible about it ... we're very used to carding people."

An employee of Veronicas sold a six pack of beer to a 19-year-old man during the sting. Arthur Perlman, an attorney representing the establishment, said it was the employee's first night working a late shift at the store.

"He was very upset because he felt he always did a good job," Perlman said. "I can tell you this, everyone at the store is going to Tips Training (a service that teaches employees of liquor licensees) this Friday in Randolph."

A bartender was fired from the Westin Hotel after he served alcohol to a 19-year-old minor at the hotel bar during the sting.

"We're actually fortunate that the error was made with someone who was not consuming the alcohol," said Colleen Keating, manager of the hotel. "(The bartender) was a multiyear employee of the hotel and he is no longer with us because we have a zero tolerance policy."

John Sinerate of the Wine Cellar at Silene said he was busy and became distracted, resulting in him serving a 19-year-old man during the sting.

“I was not thorough ... I’ve been there 12 years,” he said. “I was distracted with a customer asking questions.”

Waltham Police usually conduct liquor compliance checks about twice a year, said Champeon.

Before the sting began, the group of underage volunteers gathered in a conference room at the Waltham Police Department with plainclothes officers. They were briefed by Champeon, who collected their identification cards and gave them \$20.

Each volunteer was instructed to order a Miller Lite beer from a bar or restaurant or to purchase a six pack of beer from a store.

Once they were served, the volunteers were told to contact a police officer waiting outside, who would then come in and observe the alcoholic beverage.

On Oct. 18, M.A.D.D. Massachusetts announced it would be taking part in a fall liquor license compliance check in more than 30 communities across the state including Waltham.

“Compliance checks give us a snapshot of the average rate of illegal alcohol sales,” said Barbara Harrington, M.A.D.D. state executive director. “Preventing underage drinking is everyone’s responsibility. More, not less, must be done to address this problem.”