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100%

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Editor**

It took five years and the hard work of the Renville Alliance of the Prevention of Alcohol and Drugs (RAPAD), the Renville County Sheriff's Office and the employees of dozens of county businesses, but for the first time Renville County passed the alcohol compliance checks with 100 percent of alcohol retailers refusing to sell alcohol to someone under the age of 21.

Twenty-three retailers across the county were tested last week, and each one followed the letter of the law.

"It's huge," said Renville County Sheriff Scott Hable. "It is the culmination of a lot of work by a lot of people."



Compliance checks began in 2009 and the initial results were not encouraging. The first round, in April 2009, 50 percent of retailers failed the test. Six months later in October it seemed like

progress was being made, as 79 percent of the businesses passed. But then, six months after that, in April 2010, yet again half of the retailers sold to those younger than 21.

Those convicted of providing alcohol to an underage person can see fines up to \$3,000 and even a year in jail.

It wasn't until attendance

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No Sale

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increased at the Responsible Beverage Server Training (RBST) the numbers of compliance check failures really began to decrease and stay there.

RBST teaches alcohol retailers and servers how to check IDs, how to spot a fake ID, to see the signs of an adult buying alcohol for a minor, how to spot an intoxicated customer and the ways to refuse service to underage youth and intoxicated customers.

"Basically everything there is to know about responsible behavior," explained Hable.

When the training first began only a couple people would attend. Now dozens have taken the training and put what they learned into practice.

"People are taking it seriously," Hable said. "They understand this is a good thing."

The goal of RBST is to decrease the number of illegal alcohol sales to underage youth and intoxicated patrons. Alcohol use by those underage contributes to a rise in crime, car crashes, injuries and death. The Sheriff's

Office also finds alcohol use also has a role in the frequencies of minor infractions like noise complaints, vandalism and littering.

Public Health finds alcohol use and abuse can lead to an increase in teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and other health problems.

"We have learned that the community and our youth are safer and healthier when they don't start using alcohol until after the age of 21," said Hable in a news release.

The next RBST is Wed., Feb. 26 from 7 to 8:30 p.m. at the Renville County Government Center in Olivia in room 116. The training is free and while pre-registration is encouraged, it is not necessary. The training is led by Annie Tepfer, RAPAD Coalition Coordinator, and Renville County Sheriff Deputy Tom Swyter.

The compliance checks themselves are carried out by the Sheriff's Office. Plainclothes and uniformed officers, along with underage persons, enter the business and attempt to illegally purchase alcoholic beverages in both on-sale and off-sale

locations. The under-age persons used are usually not from the area and are not allowed to lie about their age to the server or retailer.

"Every single time they were turned away," during this round of checks, Hable said.

Some of the credit for the perfect score goes to the partnership between the Renville County Sheriff's Office and RAPAD. The passed checks are evidence that working together can bring about good results.

However, most of the success goes to those behind the bar or checkout counter.

"Really the credit goes to the retailers," said Hable. "They passed the test."

Traditionally, compliance checks are done twice a year and Hable plans to do a second round of tests sometime this year.

"One-hundred percent compliance shows that this is a new community norm for business," said Tepfer. "Minors will be carded and not served alcohol in Renville County! Congratulations to all."