



New York



Success Stories

Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Program

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NEWS FROM THE FIELD

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New York County Gets Serious About Underage Drinking

Rensselaer County's determined efforts and aggressive campaign to fight underage drinking and underage drinking and driving began in 2001 when statistics showed the underage driving-while-intoxicated (DWI) arrest rate in the county was two times greater than the State's average.

Under the leadership of Rensselaer County Executive Kathleen M. Jimino, county officials, concerned citizens, and other interested groups formed the Rensselaer County Underage Drinking Coalition. The coalition then applied for and was awarded funds specifically to address the issues of underage drinking and underage drinking and driving.

At the heart of the coalition's strategy was the need to work with law enforcement officials to begin regular enforcement of underage drinking laws. In 2003, nearly three dozen officers from county municipalities were sworn in as deputy sheriffs for countywide patrols. In addition to the local police officers assigned to these multi-jurisdictional operations, the effort also engaged the State Police, the State Liquor Authority, and the Rensselaer County Sheriff's Department. Cooperation even extended into the college community when Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute's Public Safety Office began working with the City of Troy Police Department's Community Police Unit in on- and off-campus underage drinking party patrols.

Increased enforcement activities began in February 2003, and from May through September, multiple operations were conducted that reached every municipality in the county. Enhanced patrols and simultaneous retail store compliance checks were coordinated in spring and early summer to help assure that a maximum level of law enforcement personnel was available during the prom and graduation seasons.

Enhanced party patrol and compliance check operations between May 2003 and September 2003 resulted in 20 arrests for selling to a minor, including arrests at two bars in Troy in which approximately 80 percent of the patrons inside the establishments were younger than age 21.

(The youth apprehended during these compliance check operations numbered 149.) County enforcement operations also resulted in 33 youth arrests for driving while intoxicated.

Increased enforcement operations were accompanied by an aggressive media campaign. County Executive Jimino became heavily involved in a media campaign that included several special radio and television segments, exclusive newspaper columns, regular press releases and public service announcements. County Executive Jimino also began an extensive public outreach campaign on the issue by speaking to various parent, community, and business groups in the county.

"When it comes to underage drinking, everyone needs to be sending the same message showing that we are unified in our efforts. Underage drinking is a public health problem as much as it is a public safety problem," stated County Executive Jimino.

The increased enforcement operations and proactive media campaign are starting to show results. Enforcement operations through July 2004 have resulted in only three arrests for selling to minors, and during the 2004 summer DWI patrol efforts, twelve underage DWI arrests were made. The increased attention also has resulted in a higher level of cooperation and participation from alcohol retailers, who now are working with the New York State Liquor Authority to coordinate training for clerks throughout the county.

Over the last several years, underage drinking went from a low priority issue to a high priority issue. According to County Executive Jimino, law enforcement operations will continue, and the media will be vigorously used to educate the public about Rensselaer County's determination to stop underage drinking and underage drinking and driving.

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With support from OJJDP's Enforcing the Underage Drinking Laws Initiative, community organizations, enforcement agencies, youth, and other concerned citizens are working collaboratively to change local ordinances and enforcement practices.



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