

09/29/2005

DUI drinkers' bars make county list

By Dana Yates

Consuming alcohol at a select number of San Mateo County bars could make you more likely to land in jail with a DUI, according to a report released to the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors this week.

The report is developed each year by First Chance, an organization that provides a safe place for people to sober up after being pulled over for driving under the influence. For the past three years, drunk drivers have listed five bars more often than any others in the county responsible for serving them their last drink. Those bars are the British Bankers Club in Menlo Park, the Clubhouse at the Crowne Plaza in Foster City, Fanny and Alexander's in Burlingame, Lucky Chances and Molloy's Tavern in Colma.

While the bars aren't required to stop serving an intoxicated guest, they could be held liable under California law if one of the drivers seriously injures another.

The British Bankers Club, also known as the BBC, is keenly aware of the problem. It recently created two taxi stations on Wednesdays and Fridays — the bar's two busiest night, a manager at the bar said.

The large bar is the only place to drink after 10 p.m. in Menlo Park and often attracts a large crowd.

Likewise, there are very few places to hoist a few late at night in Colma. Molloy's, located on Mission Road across from Holy Cross Cemetery, is one of those places. So is Lucky Chances card room in Colma.

In Foster City, the Clubhouse at the Crowne Plaza hotel is also mentioned as one of the most likely places to serve drunk drivers their last drink. The hotel, with easy access to State Route 92, is close to Harry's Hofbrau, which made the list last year.

This year's report lists 12 bars, including Blue Chalk in Palo Alto, British Bankers Club, the Clubhouse, Flamingo's in Redwood City, Lucky Chances, Molloy's, States Tavern in South San Francisco, The Wedge in Daly City and Blush, Fanny and Alexander's, Hola and Steelhead Brewery in Burlingame.

The report also states that nearly 50 percent of the people stopped by police are coming from a bar or a friend's house. Last year, 17 percent reported having their last drink at their own home before getting in their car. The year before, it was 20 percent.

Most drunk drivers — 37 percent — consumed beer, 27 percent consumed hard liquor and 20 percent consumed wine. A smaller percent reported drinking a combination of both. Only 2 percent reported drinking Long Island iced teas and 1 percent said they had a bit of everything.

Burlingame has the highest number of bars on the list. Burlingame Avenue, know for the number of bars and late-night debauchery hosts four of the bars that made this year's list. Fanny and Alexander's was on the list three years in a row, but recently closed and changed ownership. It is now known as Del Mar. The bar was a consistent hot spot for police, but its demise doesn't mean the city is seeing any less drunk drivers.

New to the list this year is Blush, Hola and Steelhead Brewery.

For the past six months, the Burlingame Police Department held regular meetings with bar owners and the state Alcoholic Beverage Control to find ways to control the escalating problems on the street.

“We've had some issues of bartenders serving the last drink to people on the line,” Burlingame Police Chief Jack Van Etten said. “But the violence level has diminished a little bit.”

Burlingame is cracking down on bars and letting them know they can lose their entertainment permit if they violate the law, Van Etten said.

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