projectextramile
PREVENTING ALCOHOL-RELATED HARM

Advocating for evidence-based policies and practices
to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harms.

OMAHA COALITION MEETING
Wednesday, November 18, 2026
9 a.m.

Please use to sign-in:

A G E N D A

I. Welcome and Introductions

II. Review of the October 7, 2026 Meeting Minutes
(please contact PEM staff with corrections)

III. Alcohol Policy Conference Recap
Project Extra Mile Staff

IV. Focus Area Updates

a. Local
   i. World Remembrance Day
   ii. Driving Change for Ellie
   iii. Creighton Denim Day

b. Policy
   i. 110th Legislature
   ii. Omaha Outlet Density

c. Youth
   i. November recap
   ii. Youth Leadership Network – December 7th

d. Awareness
   i. Local View: Breast cancer prevention advocates urge Nebraska to confront alcohol risks (LJS)
   ii. Alcohol & cancer presentations
   iii. November Research Summary available at www.projectextramile.org

V. Additional Discussion/Announcements

VI. Next Meeting Date: **December 9 @ 9 a.m. – Year in Review/Holiday Meeting**
UNO's Community Engagement Center, Room 209

IMPORTANT UPCOMING EVENTS
Wet Lab Event & Press Conference – November 23, 2026
Nebraska Liquor Control Commission Hearings – December 1, 2026
Public Health Association of Nebraska Annual Meeting – December 11, 2026

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PROJECT EXTRA MILE

OMAHA METRO AREA
COALITION MEETING MINUTES
October 7, 2026

I. Call to Order: Coalition Chair Tom Safranek called the meeting to order at 9:03 a.m.

II. Welcome and Introductions: Coalition members and speakers in attendance in: Jeremy Leifeld, Alvin McCruel, Jason Jones, Margie Magnuson, Lanette Richards, Tom Safranek, Genevieve Leonard, Chris Foster, Derek Schwartz, John Chapman, WOWT cameraman, Diane Riibe, Michelle Cowan-Schroeder, Anna Jo Davis, and Zach Koepp. Coalition members in attendance via Zoom: Brian Ortner, Paul Letcher, Adi Pour, Mike Tobias, Courtney Zimbelman-Burt, Allison Haun, Don Preister, Jona Beck, Orin Orchard, and Cassie Tourre. Staff members: Chris Wagner, Beatha Kliewer, and Liene Topko.

III. Approval of Minutes: The minutes from the September 9th meeting were included in the coalition meeting packet. No additions or corrections were made.

IV. Project Extra Mile Updates: Chris Wagner shared with the coalition that PEM, Monument Prevention, and Prevention Means Progress spoke with the Nebraska Liquor Control Commissioners during the October 6th hearings. The themes of the presentations were the alcohol landscape and associated harms in Nebraska, underage drinking, concerns regarding the Commissioners reducing penalties for sale to minor violations, and how the Commission can take a more active role in reducing harms in Nebraska. A copy of Wagner's comments were included in the coalition packet.

V. "Better, Not Bitter – From Bestseller to the Silver Screen: Diane Riibe, founder of Project Extra Mile provided background on what was happening with alcohol policy in Nebraska at the time of Michelle Cowan-Schroeder's husbands' death to a drunk driver in 2009. PEM was fighting the LCC's decision to tax alcopops as beer ($0.31/gal) instead of spirits ($3.75/gal) which was a 9-year process of advocacy, suing the LCC (and winning unanimously at the NE Supreme Court), and testifying before the legislature.

Anna Jo Davis, daughter of Michelle, shared that she was in high school when her father was killed in a car crash by an impaired driver. She expressed gratitude for PEM and how being involved with the organization showed her that young people can be taken seriously and grew her interest in policy.

Michelle Cowan-Schroeder said she kept notes and journaled the family's journey, which led to her wanting to pull it all together in a book for the family. She did not intend to publish it publicly, but after doing so, she became a #1 bestseller on Amazon. During a summer writing retreat, she met producer Zach Koepp and gave him the book because so many people had suggested turning the book into a movie.

Zach Keopp ultimately decided to make a movie based on the book because he himself and others he loved had been negatively impacted by alcohol and he thought the movie could help spread the message of healing.

Michelle and Zach shared that they will have ownership points in the movie and want to donate some to three organizations. Michelle shared that she will give some of her points to Project Extra Mile because of the instrumental role the organization played.

VI. Additional Discussion/Announcements: None

VII. Adjournment and Next Meeting Date: The meeting was adjourned at 9:50 a.m. The next meeting will be on November 18th.

PROJECT EXTRA MILE

YOUTH LEADERSHIP NETWORK

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT. ADVOCACY. AWARENESS. ACTION

READY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

Youth in grades 8-12 in the Omaha Metro Area are invited to join Project Extra Mile's Youth Leadership Network. Members will learn about the harms of excessive alcohol use in our community, develop the leadership skills needed to make real change, and put those skills into action!

FOCUSING ON EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO LEAD

Project Extra Mile has been creating community change for over 25 years and we are passionate about reducing alcohol-related harms in our community. In the Youth Leadership Network, we focus on teaching and practicing the skills needed to create change. Youth will receive expert guidance on projects that will utilize media literacy, public speaking, advocacy, problem-solving, and community organizing skills that they'll develop from this initiative.



A YOUTH-LED APPROACH

We're serious about youth leadership, which is why all projects are planned and developed by the youth themselves. Youth projects over the last couple years have included hosting a town hall, meeting with state senators, creating media campaigns to raise awareness, and more!



MEET AND LEARN FROM LOCAL AND STATE POLICYMAKERS

CREATE YOUR OWN MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

LEARN HOW TO USE YOUR INDIVIDUAL LEADERSHIP STYLE

MEET NEW FRIENDS AND DEVELOP SKILLS TO LAST A LIFETIME

COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITY AVAILABLE FOR SPRING 2027!







GROW YOUR LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND MAKE FRIENDSHIPS THAT LAST A LIFETIME

YOUTH LEADERSHIP NETWORK FALL MEETING SCHEDULE

AUGUST 17, 2026
7-8 P.M.
UNO CEC

SEPTEMBER 21, 2026
7-8 P.M.
UNO CEC

OCTOBER 19, 2026
7-8 P.M.
UNO CEC

NOVEMBER 16, 2026
7-8 P.M.
UNO CEC

DECEMBER 7, 2026
7-8 P.M.
UNO CEC

EXTRA MEETINGS AS NEEDED

YOUTH ADVOCACY DAY AT THE STATE CAPITOL SPRING 2027

YOUTH LEADERSHIP RETREAT SUMMER 2027

HOW TO JOIN

The Youth Leadership Network is open to all Omaha-area youth in grades 8 through 12 who want to grow as leaders and are interested in preventing alcohol-related harms in our community with the skills they develop. To indicate your interest in joining us for our next meeting, please fill out the form using the QR code below. YLN is completely free to join!

Register here!

WHERE WE MEET

The Youth Leadership Network meetings are held once a month at the Barbara Weitz Community Engagement Center (CEC) on the University of Nebraska-Omaha campus at 6400 Dodge Street, Omaha, NE. Parking is free and food and drinks are provided at each meeting (must register for food).

LEARN MORE!

To learn more about the Youth Leadership Network, please visit www.projectextramile.org/youth-leadership-network or contact us at youth@projectextramile.org or (402) 963-9047

Find us on:

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RESEARCH SUMMARY
Date Compiled: November 2026

Key takeaways from included research:

- The study examined the impact of Utah's 2018 law lowering the legal blood alcohol concentration (BAC) limit for driving to 0.05% among drivers ages 21–24, compared with neighboring states. From 2013 to 2023, Utah had consistently lower alcohol-related crash fatality rates, and the law was associated with a significant reduction in fatal crashes involving drivers with BAC levels of 0.15% or higher. These findings suggest that lower BAC limits can help prevent severe alcohol-related crashes among young adult drivers.
- This meta-analysis reviewed 19 studies involving more than 82,000 young people under age 25 to examine the link between alcohol marketing and drinking. Researchers found that youth with high exposure to alcohol advertising were 50% more likely to drink than those with low exposure, with television advertising showing the strongest association. The findings support concerns that alcohol marketing contributes to youth drinking and highlights the need for stronger prevention efforts.
- A review of 176 studies found that medical and recreational cannabis legalization may increase cannabis use, with less consistent effects among youth. Effects on other substances varied: alcohol use may decrease following medical legalization but increase among young adults following recreational legalization, while tobacco and opioid use generally showed no change or decreases.
- A study of college students found that experiencing an alcohol-induced blackout did not lead to increased drinking and was associated with 21%–40% fewer alcohol-related consequences in some groups. However, students who experienced a blackout were more likely to experience another one later. These findings suggest that blackouts may signal serious risk while also prompting changes that reduce alcohol-related harm.

World Cup fans were exposed to junk food, alcohol and gambling ads every seven seconds

Written by Marta Iraola Iribarren

Advertising for junk food, alcohol and gambling during the match live coverage of the World Cup occupied almost a quarter of the tournament's total live broadcast time, a new study has found.

Did you follow the 2026 World Cup on television? If so, you may have seen an advert for unhealthy food, alcohol or gambling every seven seconds, according to a new study.

More than 93,000 ads for products potentially harmful to human health were broadcast during coverage of the largest FIFA World Cup to date, with approximately six billion people engaging with the 2026 tournament across television, streaming, digital and social media platforms. Such advertising was visible for 39.3 hours of live play — almost a quarter of the tournament's total live broadcast time.

"This is particularly concerning given the substantial body of evidence linking marketing for unhealthy products, alcohol and gambling with increased consumption and a range of health, social and financial harms, especially among children and young people," said Raffaello Rossi, co-author of the study from the University of Bristol.

Researchers at the University of Bristol and the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom analysed all 172.6 hours of live play across the tournament's 104 matches using the UK's most powerful supercomputer, Isambard-AI, based at Bristol.

"As one of the world's most watched sporting events, reaching billions of people, this year's FIFA World Cup provided an unparalleled platform for advertising," added Rossi.

The analysis counted only advertising built into the match live coverage, such as those appearing on billboards, meaning viewers could not avoid them while following the game.

On average, viewers saw nine logos for brands associated with health or financial harm per minute of live play.

What were the main products advertised?

While all ads identified were associated with products with the potential to harm human health, not all of them occupied the same amount of space during the games.

Unhealthy food and drink brands accounted for more than seven in ten appearances, with 65,722 in total. Their combined visibility was 28.1 hours, equivalent to 16.3% of all live play. The researchers noted that this is particularly worrying as unhealthy diets are a major preventable driver of noncommunicable diseases such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, and diabetes.

"We are facing a global crisis of childhood obesity and diet-related disease, yet the world's biggest sporting event is saturated with marketing for unhealthy food and drinks," said Elisa Becker, co-author of the study at Oxford.

"Sport should be part of the solution to poor health – not one of the world's most powerful advertising platforms for the products driving it."

Prediction markets were the second-largest category, with 9,360 logos and 8.8 hours of screen time, followed by alcohol which accounted for 9,266 logos and 8.2 hours of screen time and gambling with 6,429 gambling logos and 4.2 hours.

Alcohol consumption is another leading cause of noncommunicable diseases, while gambling can lead to a variety of harms which may be financial, physical, emotional or social, the authors noted.

While there is no specific data for reach across the world, the study analysed data from 53 broadcasts in the UK and found that harmful commodity advertising generated an estimated 267 billion impressions.

According to the researchers, the study shows how the tournament acted as a “powerful platform for promoting products associated with some of the world's leading causes of preventable illness and harm”.

Movie based on book about Omaha drunk driving tragedy to benefit nonprofit

Written by John Chapman

OMAHA, Neb. (WOWT) - About 17 years ago, Joe Cowan lost his life when the car he was driving was hit by a drunk driver near 108th and Highway 36.

Now there are plans to produce a movie about how Cowan's family was able to move on after the tragedy. The movie could help others who are dealing with the same pain, and also help a local nonprofit.

"I knew Joe. Something was wrong before the state patrol showed up at my house," said Michelle Cowan-Schroeder, author.

Cowan-Schroeder was right. Something was wrong, very wrong. A drunk driver had crossed the center line, hit her husband Joe's vehicle. Her husband and the driver of the other car died in the crash.

"My daughter collapsed on the floor crying for her dad, and at that moment the only thing I could think of was I had to be a mom first," she said.

"I remember calling her and it was on Father's Day in 2009," Cowan-Schroeder said.

Journal becomes book, reaches those in recovery

Cowan-Schroeder got a lot of help and support from Project Extra Mile. Dianne Ribbe was the executive director at the time.

Cowan-Schroeder began to document this tragic time in her family's life.

"I kept everything. I wrote journals. I did all that always with the intention that someday I would put it together in a book form for her," she said.

That journal did become a book, a popular book, walking readers through Cowan-Schroeder's journey from heartache to healing. The story and the pictures connected with many people. One man in particular, who was in recovery, told Cowan-Schroeder he would use her book like a Bible.

"And he said, 'I struggle and when I have weak moments I'm going to pull this book out and I'm going to read about your journey and how this affected you and maybe someday, because you were able to forgive the drunk driver, maybe someday I'll be able to forgive myself for ruining my family,'" she said.

Book becomes movie, director understands both sides

Now Cowan-Schroeder's book is becoming a movie. Zach Koepp is the director. He knows this story from the other side.

"They've lost their husband, father, to a drunk driver. I've had a DUI, you know, and it's so emotional for us," Koepp said.

Koepp says at first it was hard for him to make the decision to turn Cowan-Schroeder's book into a movie.

"It's very hard, yeah, and I never in a million years thought that my next project would be that, and I did try to ignore it to some degree, to answer your question, yes," he said.

Both Cowan-Schroeder and Koepp announced that some of the proceeds from the film will be given to Project Extra Mile.

"It's a recognition of the work that's been done in the past but also the work that continues today, and it really is a partnership with a family that had been so tragically harmed," said Diane Ribbe, former director of Project Extra Mile.

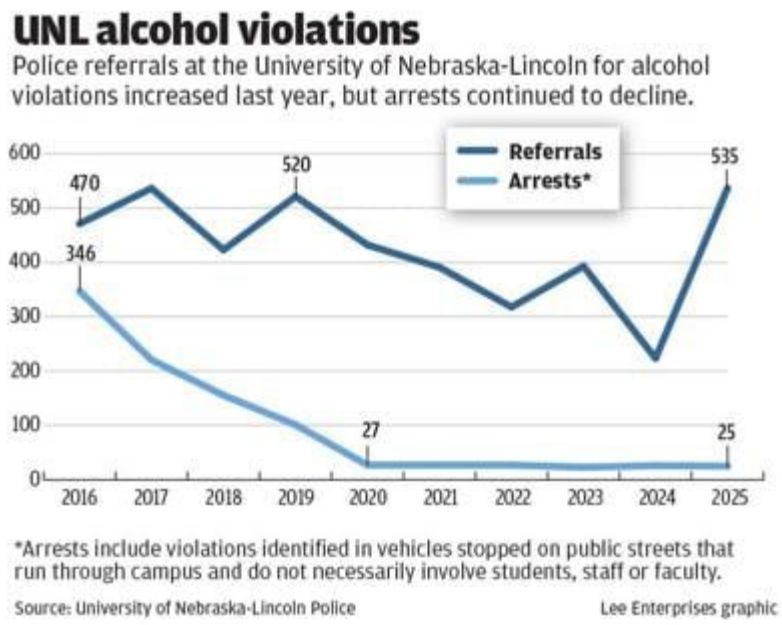
All of this coming from a tragic experience in Cowan-Schroeder and her daughter's life, how they made a decision to move on and help others. They chose to be better and not bitter.

"It's a way to honor Joe, even after all these years he's been gone, 17 and a half years," Cowan-Schroeder said.

The director of the film "Whispers from Heaven" plans to shoot most of the movie in northwest Iowa. He plans to begin production in the spring of next year.

Alcohol violations returning to pre-pandemic levels at UNL, other schools

Written by Chris Dunker



During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln watched the number of arrests and disciplinary referrals for alcohol-related violations fall — dramatically so.

In UNL's 2016 Campus Security and Fire Safety Report, there were 346 alcohol-related arrests and 470 referrals to the campus' Student Conduct board made in UNL's residence halls and campus-approved housing, which includes fraternities and sororities.

A few years later, as the country began to emerge from the other side of the pandemic, the number of alcohol-related arrests on campus had fallen by 92%.

UNL recorded just 27 arrests for alcohol violations in its 2022 campus safety report, which is mandated by the federal Clery Act.

That same year, referrals for violations of UNL's Student Code of Conduct had continued a downward trend to 317. That number would eventually bottom out at 223 referrals in the 2024 report. UNL made 26 arrests that year, according to the report.

Across the country, a similar trend had emerged, explained by pundits and reporters as "Gen Z" — adults born between the late `90s and early 2010s —having an aversion to alcohol as they sought more booze-free experiences.

But the latest Campus Security and Fire Safety Report published this week suggests that trend may have reached its expiration date.

In the last reporting year in 2025, UNL recorded a total of 535 referrals for alcohol violations, an increase of nearly 140% over the prior year.

A UNL spokeswoman said the Student Conduct office found more recent first-year cohorts were behind the increase, demonstrating "higher levels of alcohol use and participation in social gatherings compared to previous entering classes."

"The increase in alcohol-related disciplinary referrals is likely attributed to a return to pre-COVID behavioral patterns among students," the spokeswoman said.

Similar trends have emerged at other schools with large numbers of students who live on campus.

At Creighton University in Omaha, for example, the number of alcohol-related referrals peaked at 432 in 2018, according to the private university's annual campus crime report.

The number of violations reported at Creighton fell as low as 99 in 2022 but has since doubled. In 2024, there were 195 violations of Creighton's alcohol policies, according to the crime report.

And at Nebraska Wesleyan University in northeast Lincoln, there were 94 referrals for disciplinary action in 2024, which was nearly double the total from the year before. NWU reported 88 and 85 violations in 2019 and 2020, respectively. The campus did not report any alcohol-related arrests.

The increase in alcohol-related disciplinary referrals on college campuses comes as researchers have noted a shift in Gen Z's attitudes toward alcohol.

Earlier this year, International Wine & Spirits Research said the drinking rate among legal Gen Z drinkers had nearly matched the total adult population.

According to the Bevtrac survey results released in July, 74% of Gen Z consumers admitted to having at least one alcohol drink in the past six months, which was up from 66% of those polled three years earlier.

Across the total population, 76% of those surveyed indicated they had consumed at least one alcohol beverage in the prior six months. Millennials (81%) had the highest reported alcohol participation rate, while Gen X (77%) came in second.

IWSR found that while participation rates are up, many are having fewer drinks. On average, drinkers were consuming 3.9 drinks per occasion, down from 4.4 drinks reported in both 2024 and 2025. The greatest falloff was among Baby Boomers, not Gen Z, IWSR said.

"These latest results suggest this behavior has become a structural rather than a cyclical change as lifestyle choice and health reasons become more important for more consumers," the survey said.

While the number of disciplinary action taken against college students at UNL, Creighton and NWU is on the rise, arrests have not followed a similar trend.

At UNL, there have been fewer than 30 alcohol-related arrests on campus every year since 2020.

In the latest year for which data is available, 2025, there were 25 arrests made on UNL's campus, one less than in 2026, despite alcohol becoming available for sale at Husker football games.

UNL Police said the department hasn't changed how it enforces alcohol violations on campus. Referrals are most often made by university housing staff.

Both follow state law, which prohibits “the possession or consumption of alcohol in any University residence hall … regardless of the student’s age.”

Kurt Schneider, president of the Association of Students of the University of Nebraska, said the student body is continuing to evaluate how it can educate students to drink safely.

ASUN is once again partnering with ride-share firm Uber on the Husker Late Night Ride program, which offers vouchers to students who use the service between 9 p.m. and 3 a.m. Last spring, some 13,800 vouchers were redeemed.

Schneider said Husker Athletics along with Hauptman, O’Brien, Wolf & Lathrop are supporting the program this year, which provides students 3 ride vouchers valued at $8 each.

The ASUN Campus Life and Safety Committee is also partnering with Circle K and UNL to put on a tailgate before the Huskers take on Washington on Oct. 31.

Schneider said the tailgate will provide food and water and have alcohol education available for students choosing to participate in a pre-game alternative.

Driver charged with aggravated DUI 4 months after Omaha crash

Written by Mike McKnight

OMAHA, Neb. (WOWT) - A teenage daughter was involved in a crash that was not her fault. Her injuries were not life-threatening, but her mother says the consequences for the other driver should be more severe.

Melissa Wood took her own photos at 168th and Sprague streets on July 10, 2026, while police investigated. She zoomed in on the vehicle whose driver was cited for causing the crash.

“No, I didn’t even have to go near the vehicle to be able to see the open containers, the beer can on the floor of the vehicle,” Wood said.

Dan Speicher, 57, is the driver accused of crashing into a Jeep driven by Wood’s 17-year-old daughter, who suffered minor injuries.

Mother questions officers’ handling of scene

Wood alleges Omaha officers at the scene made a major mistake because the alcohol-suspected box on the police report shows no.

“Three officers involved, and none of the three of them saw probable cause to do any field sobriety,” Wood said.

Wood says her photo shows Speicher lying injured. He was then taken to a hospital, where the city prosecutor subpoenaed a blood draw that was tested.

About four months after the crash, Wood received an answer from the city prosecutor about her belief that the other driver had been drinking.

The city prosecutor charged Speicher with aggravated DUI, alleging his blood alcohol tested above 0.15, almost twice the legal limit.

Asked if he wanted to say anything about the crash, Speicher said, “No sir, thank you.”

Wood says she is thankful she took the photo of the inside of Speicher’s vehicle and sent it to the city prosecutor.

“It wasn’t about me being proved right. It was about justice being served,” Wood said.

Insurance charge and complaint

The family’s Jeep was totaled, and Speicher is also charged with no proof of insurance.

“Uninsured motorist insurance is not the best,” Wood said.

Wood filed a complaint against the investigating officers for allegedly not alcohol testing the at-fault driver at the scene. Omaha police can’t comment, but Wood says internal affairs told her the officers faced disciplinary action.

Ex-director of Nebraska Liquor Control Commission pleads guilty to federal charges

Written by Lori Pilger

The former longtime director of the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission pleaded guilty Wednesday to two felonies for accepting cash bribes, private dances and sexual favors in exchange for protecting two Lincoln strip clubs and targeting their rivals.

At his sentencing, Hobert "Hobie" Rupe, 59, will face up to 20 years on each of two charges: conspiracy to commit honest services fraud and Hobbs Act extortion under the color of official right.

Rupe was federally indicted last year on eight charges, but prosecutors dropped six as part of the plea agreement.

Outside of the courtroom, defense attorney Bill McGinn said Rupe has been forthcoming about his decisions not being good and he wants to "make it right" with Nebraska taxpayers.

"It's something that's owed and needs to be paid back," he said.

McGinn said he will ask U.S. District Judge Susan Bazis for a sentence less than 20 years in federal prison at the hearing set for Feb. 4.

There is no parole in the federal system.

At the hearing, Assistant U.S. Attorney Julie Mruz said in May 2024, following a double homicide outside The Office Gentlemen's Club, a bar and strip club in west Lincoln, Lincoln Police investigators found security video footage of Rupe on April 26, 2024, receiving a bundle of cash under the table from one of the club owners.

She said a few minutes later, Rupe went into a private room for a dance he paid for with cash he'd been given.

"The investigation revealed numerous occasions where co-defendants ... would provide Rupe with cash, sexual acts performed on Rupe by dancers and other accommodations at The Office and The Night Before Lounge, such as free private dances, free VIP dances, a waiver of any coverage charge and free alcoholic beverages," Mruz said.

She alleged that one of The Office's part owners provided information about the dancers and their schedules to Rupe, who looked them up in the state’s Criminal Justice Information System, an unlawful use of the system.

Mruz said employees kept track of the cash provided to Rupe "that was expensed by the business to influence Rupe over time in the performance of his official duties." They used sticky notes marked "COB," for cost of business, to log money taken out of the business safe and given to Rupe.

She alleged one of the part-owners, co-defendant Brent Zywiec, had kept video of Rupe receiving oral sex from a dancer.

Mruz said, in exchange for the benefits, Rupe used his position to effectively protect The Office and The Night Before from law enforcement, "while simultaneously targeting investigations toward the club's business competitors."

She said the owner of now-defunct Krush Ultra Lounge in Omaha told law enforcement that he made a $40,000 cash payment in order to maintain his liquor license at his earlier club, Throwback Lounge, to take care of issues with the Liquor Control Commission.

When his license was at risk again in 2023, after the Omaha City Council denied his application, he paid $25,000 more. On appeal, the Liquor Control Commission approved it, Mruz said.

She said after he tried to extend his club's hours in 2024, he was asked for $40,000 more, which he didn't have. Almost immediately upon reopening, he began to receive tavern violations and ultimately ended up surrendering his liquor license.

After Mruz was done giving the factual basis, Magistrate Judge Jacqueline DeLuca asked Rupe if he heard what Mruz had said.

"Do you agree the government could prove those facts beyond a reasonable doubt if you went to trial on the charges set forth in the indictment?" she asked him.

"Yes, I do," Rupe answered.

"Did you do those things that the government's attorney said that you did?" DeLuca asked him.

"Yes," he said.

DeLuca said she would recommend Judge Bazis accept Rupe's plea.

He worked as executive director of the Liquor Control Commission from December 2003 until he resigned in June 2025, after the allegations surfaced.

Rupe is released pending sentencing.

A hearing has been set in November where a trial date could be set for Rupe's co-defendants: Brent Zywiec, Dan Thomas and Shane Zywiec.

York County Sheriff's Office reports growing increase in DUI arrests

Written by Danielle DaSilva

YORK, Neb. (KLKN) – More drivers are getting caught for driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol in York.

Sergeant Taylor Samek has worked for the York County Sheriff's Office for over a decade and says the increase started after COVID.

"For DUI drug numbers, York County is second in court filings in the state of Nebraska for people that are driving under the influence of drugs," said Samek.

"And for a county our size, that puts us right behind Lancaster County," he said.

The York County Sheriff's Office reported seven DUI arrests this week alone.

Most recently, a driver traveling to Lincoln was caught driving at 92 mph.

After being pulled over by a nightside deputy, the driver was found to have a blood alcohol level of nearly three times the legal limit.

"That not only affects the impaired driver's life for a while, but it also affects families within our community for a while, because you've got to think, that's someone that's not showing up to the table at Thanksgiving, they're not there for Christmas, that's life-altering stuff," said Samek.

The Sheriff's Office is proactively working to combat this trend.

Sgt. Samek teaches field sobriety testing and DUI detection in the academy.

As for advice to other drivers?

"The biggest thing is to plan ahead," he said, referring to having a designate driver arrange before heading out.

"You know, obviously we're a small community, you know, ride share here isn't necessarily the best option," said Samek.

"All it takes is you drifting over that center line, and that could have life-altering effects for you and the other driver. I think that's the main thing that people tend to forget is, oh, you know what, it's only a couple blocks, I won't get caught. We're out there. We're out there stopping cars. If you're going out tonight, so are we," he said.

The Sheriff's Office asks that if the public notices an impaired driver on the roadway, to report it immediately to 911 or their non-emergency line at 402-362-4927.

Local view: Breast cancer prevention advocates urge Nebraska to confront alcohol risks

Written by Liene Topko

October was Breast Cancer Awareness Month, a time when communities across Nebraska came together to support those impacted by breast cancer, promote early screening, and celebrate advances in treatment and survival. Awareness should be more than pink ribbons — our communities need evidence-based alcohol policies to reduce cancer risk.

While most people think of motor vehicle crashes as the main driver of alcohol-related deaths, the truth is that chronic health conditions such as cancer, heart and liver disease, and more account for 75% of all alcohol-related deaths in Nebraska. Science has long known that alcohol is a class 1 human carcinogen (known to cause cancer in humans), and breast cancer is one of seven cancers caused by alcohol consumption.

The National Cancer Institute (NCI) reports that even low levels of alcohol consumption are associated with breast cancer risk. Women who consume one drink per day see a 7-10% increase in their risk of developing breast cancer compared to non-drinkers. Those who consume 2 to 3 drinks per day have about a 20 percent higher risk of developing breast cancer. A recent study also found that individuals consuming one drink per day have a 1 in 1,000 lifetime risk of alcohol-related death, whereas consuming two drinks per day significantly increases risk to 1 in 25. These are not just statistics; our neighbors are suffering due to alcohol consumption.

NCI reports that approximately 1,494 Nebraska women are diagnosed with breast cancer each year. The state's 2025-2030 Cancer Plan specifically targets reducing excessive alcohol consumption as a cancer prevention priority. Nearly one in five (18.2%) Nebraskans (age 18+) reported binge drinking in 2025, which is the third-highest rate in the nation and 4.2% above the national average. Alcohol must be a part of conversations about cancer prevention, and we must do more to reduce alcohol-related cancer incidence and harms in Nebraska.

In Nebraska and across the country, alcohol and cancer risk must be made a part of routine public health messaging. People cannot make informed decisions about their health and alcohol use if less than 60% of them know that alcohol causes cancer. Healthcare providers, cancer organizations and public health agencies should routinely discuss alcohol as a modifiable cancer risk. A key concern is that the 2025–2030 U.S. Dietary Guidelines moved away from previous science-based recommendations by removing specific daily alcohol limits and replacing them with the vague advice to "consume less alcohol for better overall health." They also omitted the established link between alcohol and cancer, leaving Americans with less specific guidance despite strong evidence that alcohol increases breast cancer risk.

Educating the public may also influence the decisions organizations are making, especially cancer-focused organizations that utilize alcohol as a fundraising tool. The American Society of Clinical Oncology recommends eliminating the use of breast cancer awareness to promote products or brands without adequately addressing their potential harms ("pinkwashing"). With the help of investigative reporting, major cancer-focused organizations appear to be receiving the message. Following a STAT News report, the American Cancer Society canceled a

fundraiser with the alcohol industry and may be considering further changes to fundraising policies involving alcohol.

Aside from being more transparent on the risks of alcohol consumption, Nebraska needs better policies that can discourage excessive drinking and its harms. There was a bill that would have done that last year, but it died in the Revenue Committee. It would have increased the state sales tax on alcohol by 10%. The benefits would have extended beyond reducing cancer cases to include safer roads, less sexual violence, reduced crime and lower costs for Nebraska taxpayers.

Cancer Awareness Months provide an opportunity to broaden the conversation about prevention. The science is clear — we can reduce cancer risk by reducing excessive alcohol consumption. Let’s make sure the pink ribbon is the beginning of a conversation that includes honest conversations about alcohol, responsible organizational practices, and evidence-based policy action. Leading cancer prevention organizations like the American Society of Clinical Oncology, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, International Agency for Research on Cancer, and the World Health Organization want us all to know that reducing excessive alcohol consumption is cancer prevention.

Nebraska State Patrol says trooper uninjured when drunk driver rear-ended cruiser

Written by Kevin Cole

A Nebraska State Patrol trooper escaped injury when an alleged drunk driver rear-ended his cruiser while he was working traffic control Saturday in Omaha.

The crash occurred near the U.S. Highway 75 ramp from Interstate 480 shortly after midnight while the trooper was investigating another crash. In the aftermath, the State Patrol reminded drivers to move over when when they see emergency lights.

"We are extremely thankful our Trooper was not injured when a drunk driver crashed into his cruiser in Omaha," the State Patrol said in a post on social media. "The trooper was outside his unit assisting with traffic control for a different crash."

A spokesperson for the State Patrol said Sunday that the driver was arrested by officers from the Omaha Police Department on suspicion of driving while intoxicated, driving with a revoked license and carrying a concealed weapon while intoxicated.

"This past week was Crash Responder Safety Week. Whenever you come upon a crash scene, pay attention and move over to keep responders safe," the State Patrol said on Facebook. "Also, don’t drive drunk or with a revoked license."

To report a driver suspected to be impaired:

• For an immediate threat: Dial 911 for local police, sheriff deputies or state troopers.

• Highway or Interstate Helpline: Dial *55 from a mobile phone or call 1-800-525-5555 to connect directly with the Nebraska State Patrol dispatch center in Lincoln, which broadcasts details to area troopers.

• Information: When it is safe to do so, try to give a report of the vehicle's description, including make, model, color and license plate number.

Give the exact location or direction of travel, including highway and nearest cross street. Please give a description of the erratic or dangerous driving behavior.

Lincoln man charged after drunkenly abandoning 4-year-old girl in vehicle, police say

Written by Jacob Elliott

LINCOLN, Neb. (KOLN) - A Lincoln man was charged after drunkenly abandoning a 4-year-old girl in a vehicle, court documents show.

Police officers were called to a south Lincoln home on the report of a kidnapping. A man called 911 on behalf of 26-year-old Sergio Rivera III, reporting that an unknown person had stolen his vehicle with a 4-year-old still inside.

Upon their arrival, officers contacted several people at the house, including Rivera.

According to court records, Rivera, a woman and two children were visiting a friend's house near North 17th and Knox streets. When they went to leave, the woman put the 4-year-old child in the back seat. The woman then realized she had left her cell phone inside and went back inside with the 7-year-old to find it.

Rivera reportedly became impatient and decided to drive off. The woman later made arrangements to be picked up from her friend's house.

When the woman returned home, she noticed the vehicle was missing, but that Rivera was still in the house. Rivera told the woman that, while traveling home, he was stopped in the downtown area by an unknown person who stole his wallet, vehicle keys and vehicle, with the 4-year-old still inside, police wrote.

While officers spoke with Rivera, they noticed that he was heavily intoxicated, and his statements about the incident were inconsistent, documents show.

Location tracking was used to find Rivera's last location. The vehicle was found in the area of South 14th and Smith streets, about two and a half blocks from their house.

According to the court documents, the 4-year-old was found seated in the back seat, unattended. She had been left alone, in 43-degree weather, with the windows down for about an hour. The 4-year-old seemed upset and was crying, and told police that Rivera had left her in the car.

Rivera was arrested and later charged with child abuse and false reporting. His bond was set at 10% of $10,000. His next court date is Dec. 21.