

OMAHA COALITION MEETING
Wednesday, April 10, 2024
9 a.m.

Please use to sign-in:



AGENDA

- I. Welcome and Introductions
- II. Review of the March 13, 2023 Meeting Minutes
(please contact PEM staff with corrections)
- III. Preview of Project Extra Mile's Community-Based Trainings
- IV. Focus Area Updates
 - a. Local
 - i. Throwback Arcade Lounge
 - b. Policy
 - i. Legislative Update
 - c. Enforcement
 - i. Saturation Patrol Results
 - ii. Compliance Checks in Blair, Cass County
 - d. Youth
 - i. Youth Leadership Day
 - ii. LR 353
 - iii. Youth Leadership Retreat – June 25-27, 2024 in Omaha
 - e. Awareness
 - i. Alcohol Awareness Month
 - ii. April Research Summary available at www.projectextramile.org
- V. Additional Discussion/Announcements
- VI. Adjournment and Next Meeting Date: **May 8th, 9 a.m., Zack Hicks with the Division of Behavioral Health**
UNO's Community Engagement Center, Room 201

IMPORTANT UPCOMING EVENTS

Youth Leadership Network Meeting – April 15, 2024 at 7:00 p.m.
Nebraska Liquor Control Commission Hearings – May 7, 2024
Youth Leadership Retreat – June 25-27, 2024

PROJECT EXTRA MILE
OMAHA METRO AREA
COALITION MEETING MINUTES
March 13, 2024

- I. Call to Order: Tom Safranek called the meeting to order at 9 a.m.
- II. Welcome and Introductions: Coalition members and speakers in attendance: Russ Zeeb, Cole Williby, Ashley Pick, Brian Ortner, Shelby Bingham, Derek Schwartz, Tom Safranek, Ashley Meyers, Mike Jones, Erin Ayad, Carey Pomykata, Maggie Ballard, Jim Timm, Toby Czapla, Alvin McCruel, and Palistene Gray-Moore. Coalition members in attendance via Zoom: Jayna Schaaf, Whitney Abbott, Zack Hicks, Jordan Cedillo, Jolene Rohde, and Jim Boucher. Staff members: Chris Wagner, Beatha Kliewer, and Liene Topko.
- III. Approval of Minutes: The minutes from the February 14th meeting were included in the coalition meeting packet. No additions or corrections were made.
- IV. Highlights from the First Statewide Highway Safety Conference: Ashley Pick with the Highway Safety Office (HSO) provided a review of the first annual highway safety conference and how they hope to grow it in the future. Topics included impaired driving, grant writing, engaging youth and the community at large, teen driver safety, drug recognition & enforcement, policies around traffic safety, and more. Ashley also provided a summary of what the HSO does and how it supports law enforcement as well as community coalitions and non-profit organizations. She also shared that while the number of DUIs have been decreasing in the state, the average BAC of those DUIs has increased with the highest in 2020 at 0.175 BAC, in 2023 it was 0.17 BAC.
- V. Focus Area Updates
 - a. Local
 - i. Liene Topko invited coalition members to reach out to the organization with training needs and wishes as they pertain to excessive alcohol consumption, related harms, and how to address these harms in the community. The trainings are tailored to individual groups – organizations, health departments, neighborhood associations, and more.
 - b. Policy
 - i. Topko updated the group on bills at the legislature:
 1. LB836, to co-branded product bill, was amended into LB 685 and advanced from select file on March 7th.
 2. LB875, the bill prohibiting retailers from selling products below wholesale price, was advanced to general file on February 27th.
 3. LB1204, the bill defining and permitting rickhouses, was placed on select file on March 12th.
 - ii. Chris Wagner shared that LB974 harmonizes penalties for a motor vehicle homicide of an unborn child as a result of impaired driving. The bill is still in the judiciary committee.

- c. Enforcement
 - i. Wagner shared that Omaha Metro law enforcement agencies will be conducting saturation patrols during St. Patrick's Day weekend to watch for impaired drivers.
- d. Youth
 - i. Wagner shared that the Youth Leadership Network will be traveling to Lincoln on Monday, March 18th for the Youth Leadership Day to meet with legislators to educate policymakers about alcohol-related problems in their community and advocate for a study that would examine the need for pricing increases in our state.
 - ii. The next Youth Leadership Network meeting is on Monday, April 14th at 7-8 p.m. at the UNO Community Engagement Center.
 - iii. The Youth Leadership Retreat will be held June 25-27, 2024, at the Lutheran Church of the Master's West Campus in Omaha.
- e. Awareness
 - i. The March Research Summaries are available at www.projectextramile.org/ResearchSummary
 - ii. Topko shared that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently updated data on deaths as a result of excessive alcohol consumption. 2015-2019 showed that 140,000 people died each year as a result of this behavior, whereas 2020-2021 data shows that 178,000 die every year.

VI. Additional Discussion/Announcements:

- a. Shelby Bingham with the Metro Omaha Tobacco Action Coalition invited attendees to reach out to her or visit the website (www.motac.org) to learn more about the \$2/pack tobacco tax increase proposal.

VII. Adjournment and Next Meeting Date: The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 a.m.

Training Opportunity

IS YOUR COMMUNITY INTERESTED
IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT...

Excessive Alcohol Consumption

What is excessive consumption? What are the associated harms? What does it look like in Nebraska? What strategies are proven to be effective in preventing excessive alcohol consumption and its harms?

Liquor Licensing Process

How can communities be more engaged and informed? How can alcohol outlets negatively impact neighborhoods? What can communities do to prevent new and existing problem outlets?

Advocacy vs. Lobbying

Lobbying is always advocacy, but advocacy isn't always lobbying. Being an effective advocate requires us to know the difference between the two. Understanding these basics will help empower organizations and communities to advocate on the issues that most impact them, enhancing both public health and safety.

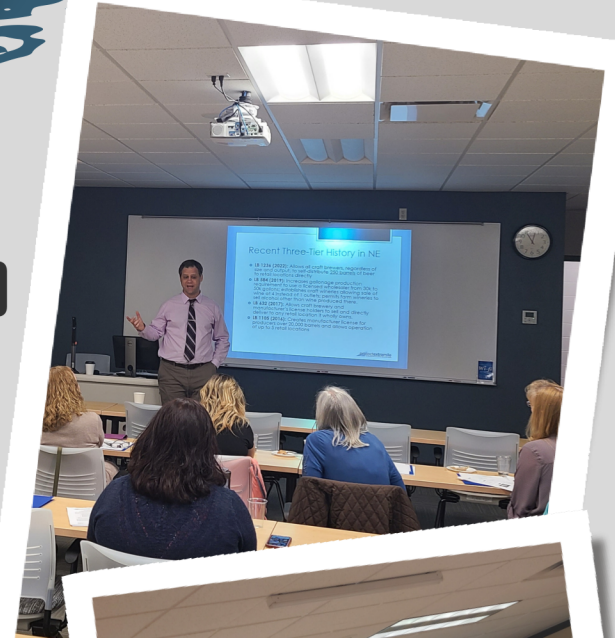
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Project Extra Mile's

YOUTH LEADERSHIP RETREAT

Project Extra Mile is a network of community coalitions across the state of Nebraska working to prevent excessive alcohol consumption, including underage drinking and its harms.

This is only possible through improved laws, increased enforcement, media advocacy, increased awareness and most importantly, powerful young voices leading the way!

LEARN TO USE YOUR VOICE TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE!

Where:

Lutheran Church of the Master West
1200 N 181st Ct., Omaha, NE

Who:

Students in grades 8-12 who are interested in becoming an effective leader to make change in their community are encouraged to attend.

When:

June 25-27, 2024

Cost:

Cost is \$75 per student and includes overnight lodging, food, t-shirt, activities, and of course the leadership retreat!



**REGISTRATION
OPENS 4/1/24**

📞 402-963-9047

🌐 www.projectextramile.org

CELEBRATING
25 YEARS
1999-2024
projectextramile
PREVENTING ALCOHOL-RELATED HARM

This project is supported by the Nebraska Department of Transportation - Highway Safety Office (CFDA 20.600) and the Region 6 Behavioral Healthcare Block Grant, CFDA 93.959/Federal Award Number B08T1084658, through the Department of Health & Human Services, SAMHSA, and NE DHHS.



RESEARCH SUMMARY
Date Compiled: April 2024

Key takeaways from included research:

- Following the passing of Senate Bill 571 in Maryland, hours of sale of alcohol for bars/taverns in a Baltimore neighborhood were reduced from 6a-2a to 9a-10p with the goal of reducing violent crime in the neighborhood. Researchers studied the impacts of this and found that violent crime density decreased by 23% per year in the neighborhood this was implemented. This suggests that alcohol policies that reduce hours of sale could aid cities and municipalities in decreasing violent crime.
- Researchers examined the association between reduced alcohol consumption and the risk of major adverse cardiovascular events (MACEs) in people who drink heavily. They found that individuals who sustained heavy drinking during the experiential period had a significantly higher incidence of MACEs than those who decreased their consumption. This suggests that reducing alcohol consumption is associated with decreased risk of future cardiovascular disease.
- A study examined the trajectories of alcohol and cannabis use in months leading up to, during, and following the months of an individual's 21st birthday. Researchers found that generally, alcohol use as well as simultaneous alcohol and cannabis use showed sharp increases a month prior to the 21st birthday and decreases a month following. Whereas for cannabis use alone there was a significant increase in the month prior to the 21st birthday and no significant changes the month after.
- A research team examined sleep in children with prenatal alcohol exposure and found that children (aged 6-10) with prenatal alcohol exposure showed greater intraindividual sleep variability and parents reported more sleep problems related to sleeping behavior. Researchers concluded that difficulties with sleep may be related to other cognitive and behavioral outcomes.

International Women's Day: Europeans unaware alcohol linked to breast cancer, WHO says

Written by Oceane Duboust

Drinking alcohol, even in small amounts, raises the risk of breast cancer, the most common cancer among European women.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among women and alcohol consumption is a major risk factor for it.

Yet there's a lack of awareness about that risk, the World Health Organization (WHO)'s European office warned on International Women's Day.

"It's high time for everyone to acknowledge that alcohol is a major risk factor for breast cancer," said Dr Hans Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe.

"International Women's Day is a unique opportunity to remind ourselves of alcohol's link, not just to breast cancer, but indeed all cancers".

Research shows that there is no "safe" amount of alcoholic drinks and even a small amount of alcohol is linked to an increased risk of breast cancer in women.

But nearly 80 per cent of women surveyed across 14 European countries were unaware of that risk, a recent study showed, despite the more than 600,000 cases of breast cancer being diagnosed in 2022 in Europe.

"Considering that Europe has the highest drinking levels in the world, reducing or limiting our alcohol intake is a great place to start to reduce harms and prioritise health," Kluge added.

The risk goes up as alcoholic consumption increases.

Women who have three alcoholic drinks per week have a 15 per cent higher risk of breast cancer compared to non-drinkers, according to the charity Breastcancer.org.

In Europe, breast cancer represents 66 per cent of alcohol-related cancers among women.

How does alcohol consumption impact the body?

When we drink alcohol, the body breaks down ethanol into a substance called acetaldehyde, which can damage our DNA - the genetic material in our cells. This can lead to mutations which in turn can sometimes cause cancer.

Alcohol can also interfere with the body's ability to break down estrogen, a hormone that can stimulate the growth of some breast cancers.

Though estrogen is naturally produced in the body, alcohol consumption can increase the levels of circulating estrogen in the bloodstream and reduce the body's ability to metabolise it, according to the US medical centre the Cleveland Clinic.

Roughly 70 to 80 per cent of breast cancers are sensitive to estrogen, meaning that the tumourous cells will react to the hormone by growing and multiplying, according to the charity Breastcancer.org.

In a statement, the WHO insisted on the need for gender-specific approaches in public health strategies related to alcohol consumption as “substances often affect men and women differently due to differences in metabolism and body composition between the sexes”.

A recent study in the US found that even though men account for significantly more alcohol-related deaths, there is a higher rate of increase in deaths among women.

Though countries have committed to reducing cancer mortality and risk factors such as alcohol consumption, WHO said that “there have been no changes in alcohol consumption per capita in the European Union since 2010”.

“Therefore, there is an increasing urgency for governments to act immediately,” the WHO added.

Kluge said that the organisation was “urging countries to introduce clear warnings on alcoholic products like they already do with tobacco products”.

Lincoln Police: Repeat DUI offender crashes car with BAC five times legal limit

Written by Dan Swanson

LINCOLN, Neb. (KOLN) - Lincoln Police responded to a crash in north Lincoln and discovered a driver slumped over the wheel.

The driver, identified as Eric Grenemeier, 37, appeared to be asleep after crashing into another vehicle at the intersection of 27th and Fairfield streets on Thursday night.

Upon approaching the vehicle, officers said they smelled alcohol. Grenemeier was subjected to a breathalyzer test which revealed a blood alcohol concentration of .427, according to Lincoln Police. The legal blood alcohol limit in Nebraska is 0.08.

This incident marked Grenemeier's third DUI offense, with previous incidents on Wednesday and Feb. 12. He was arrested on suspicion of DUI.

Additionally, Grenemeier was cited and released for various violations, including no proof of financial responsibility, violating an automatic traffic signal and negligent driving.

LPD said despite the damage to the vehicles involved in the crash, no injuries were reported.

Man in critical condition after stabbing at north Lincoln bar

Written by Joseph McCarty, Matthew Mittlieder

LINCOLN, Neb. (KLKN) — A man suffered life-threatening injuries early Saturday morning in a stabbing outside a Lincoln bar.

The Lincoln Police Department said officers were sent to the area of Superior Street and Bair Avenue just before 1:30 a.m.

When they arrived, they found a 36-year-old man with stab wounds.

Witnesses said the man was stabbed multiple times after a fight, according to police

Phillip Mays, the general manager of the bar, said the two men were only at the bar a few minutes before the stabbing happened.

“They lightly talked to each other and then as they walked out the door, one gentleman stabbed the other gentleman,” he said. “My security jumped on top of him right away covered his neck.”

The victim was taken to a hospital, where police said he is in critical condition.

Mays said the bar is usually a safe, family friendly place.

“We had no idea that was going to happen,” he said. “We have security on premise every night and never had any trouble here.”

As a precaution, Mays said there will be an extra security guard at the bar on Saturday night. Police said there is no threat to the public, but they haven’t arrested any suspects.

Anyone with information, including video of the stabbing, should contact LPD at 402-441-6000 or Crime Stoppers at 402-475-3600.

19-year-old drives 140 mph before crashing car in northeast Nebraska, sheriff says

Written by Andrew Ward

STANTON COUNTY, Neb. (KLKN) — A 19-year-old led Stanton County deputies on a high speed chase before crashing his car late Tuesday.

The Stanton County Sheriff's Office said it happened just before midnight on Highway 275 just east of Norfolk.

The sheriff said deputies clocked Cameron Bussinger going more than 140 mph when they tried to pull him over for a traffic stop.

Bussinger then turned onto a county road and turned his lights off to avoid authorities.

The sheriff's office said he drove east on 842nd Road before he crashed through a locked gate of a cattle yard. He caused severe damage to his vehicle and lost a tire into the cattle yard fence.

Bussinger was arrested on several charges. The Stanton County sheriff said he was a blood alcohol level more than twice the legal limit at the time he was taken into custody.

He was released after posting bond. He's due in court in April.

Nebraska State Patrol arrests 10 impaired drivers during St. Patrick's Day weekend

Written by WOWT Staff

LINCOLN, Neb. (WOWT) - The Nebraska State Patrol says troopers removed 10 impaired drivers from the road over the weekend as part of a special enforcement operation for St. Patrick's Day.

The effort ran from Saturday evening through Monday morning in cooperation with several law enforcement agencies from around the state.

NSP says in addition to the 10 drivers arrested for DUI, troopers also issued 171 citations for speeding, three citations for minors in possession of alcohol, two for lack of seat belt use, two for improper child restraint, and 14 for driving with a suspended license. 54 motorist assists were also performed over the course of the weekend.

NSP reminds drivers to be safe and drive sober as warmer weather approaches. Troopers will take part in additional traffic safety initiatives through the spring and summer months.

Douglas County Sheriff's Office cruiser struck by drunk driver

Written by 6 News staff reports

OMAHA, Neb. (WOWT) - The Douglas County Sheriff's Office says one of its cruisers was hit by a suspected intoxicated driver on St. Patrick's Day.

DCSO says the crash happened just before 2 a.m. Sunday near 83rd and L Streets. After hitting the cruiser, the driver then allegedly sped east down L Street.

Ralston Police spotted the vehicle near 72nd and Q Streets. The driver, Mateo Colon, 28, of Omaha, reportedly had a blood alcohol level of .224, nearly three times the legal limit. He was booked into Douglas County Corrections for driving under the influence, leaving the scene of an accident, and not having a driver's license.

Over the holiday weekend, DCSO deputies made three arrests, including the aforementioned driver, and issued 21 citations -- seven of them for DUI and five for speeding, among other infractions. The enforcement was made possible through a mini-grant from Project Extra Mile and the Douglas County DUI Task Force.

To curb drunk driving, Nebraska law enforcement used more than \$30K in grants last weekend

Written by Aaron Hegarty

OMAHA, Neb. —The Nebraska Highway Safety Office estimates more than \$30,000 was awarded to law enforcement agencies across the state to help curb impaired driving over St. Patrick's Day weekend.

Highway Safety Administrator Bill Kovarik says grant efforts to help agencies staff up around holidays work.

"They work in that the public will see an increased presence in law enforcement out in the area," he said.

For example, the Omaha Police Department says it was able to use funds to put 16 additional officers on the streets over St. Patrick's Day weekend.

Lt. Danny Flynn said officers jump on the opportunity for overtime.

Omaha Police officers covered by the grant made 15 impaired driving arrests. One was for drugs, the rest were for alcohol. Other officers made five more impaired driving arrests.

The Nebraska State Patrol says troopers arrested 10 impaired drivers. The Douglas County Sheriff's Office says it gave seven DUI citations.

A new study says drinking alcohol raises heart disease risk — especially for women

Written by Korin Miller

Research has linked higher levels of alcohol use to everything from cancer to liver disease, but the messaging around its impact on heart health has been unclear over the past few years. Now there's new data to suggest that a regular drinking habit can raise the risk of developing heart disease. This appears to be especially true for women.

The study, which will be presented at the American College of Cardiology's annual scientific session, analyzed data from more than 430,000 people without heart disease who received care in the Kaiser Permanente Northern California integrated health organization between 2014 and 2015. Information on participants' alcohol consumption was collected during primary care visits, with researchers comparing that data to coronary heart disease diagnoses during a four-year follow-up period. (Coronary heart disease happens when the arteries that supply blood to the heart become narrowed, limiting blood flow. This can also raise the risk of chest pain and heart events, including a heart attack.)

During the study period, 3,108 participants were diagnosed with coronary heart disease, and the rates increased with higher levels of alcohol consumption. In women, those who had high alcohol intake (defined as eight or more drinks a week) had a 45% higher risk of heart disease compared with those who reported low intake (one to two drinks a week). Women who had high alcohol intake also had a 29% higher risk compared to moderate drinkers, who had three to seven drinks a week.

Women in the binge-drinking category were 68% more likely to develop heart disease compared to women who said they were moderate drinkers. Binge drinking was defined as having more than three drinks in a single day.

Men who had high alcohol intake (defined as 15 or more drinks per week) were 33% more likely to develop heart disease compared with men who had moderate intake, or three to 14 drinks a week.

Worth noting: There was no significant difference in risk between people who reported having moderate alcohol intake compared to low alcohol intake.

"There has long been this idea that alcohol is good for the heart — but more and more evidence is challenging that notion," lead study author Dr. Jamal Rana, a cardiologist with the Permanente Medical Group and an adjunct investigator in the division of research at Kaiser Permanente Northern California, tells Yahoo Life.

The study isn't perfect — the researchers even pointed out that people tend to underreport how much alcohol they have to a health care provider, for example — but it's raising a lot of questions about alcohol use and heart health, especially in women.

Why are women more at risk?

Doctors say there are a few issues at play here. "Overall, alcohol can raise blood pressure, which is a risk factor for coronary heart disease, and it may also trigger an inflammatory response," Dr. Jennifer Wong, a cardiologist and medical director of Non-Invasive Cardiology at MemorialCare Heart and Vascular Institute at Orange Coast Medical Center in Fountain Valley, Calif., tells

Yahoo Life. “Inflammation has been thought to contribute to atherosclerosis, which is the thickening or hardening of the arteries.” Alcohol can also raise cholesterol levels as well as the risk of obesity, both of which are coronary heart disease risk factors, she says.

But all of those factors are true for women and men. Why do women seem to be more at risk?

“Women process alcohol differently than men due to biological differences, including in body size,” Rana says. Women’s bodies usually absorb more alcohol, and it takes them longer to metabolize it, he explains.

Dr. Anne Curtis, a cardiologist at the University at Buffalo Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, agrees. “It’s just body size to a large extent,” she tells Yahoo Life. “Women tend to be smaller than men and the amount of alcohol that you drink can have a greater impact.”

There’s also this to consider, according to Wong: “Women in general also seem more sensitive to cardiovascular risk factors.”

But alcohol use in young and middle-aged women has also been increasing, raising concerns about what this will mean for their heart health, Rana says.

For reference, the Dietary Guidelines for Americans — which does not recommend taking up an alcohol habit for health — suggest that women have no more than one drink a day, and that having even less is best.

What does this mean for men?

The study found the biggest jumps in risk in women, but men still had a higher risk of heart disease when they drank more. Still, men shouldn’t interpret the findings as an excuse to drink more than the recommended limit of two drinks a day, Curtis says.

“Men need to pay attention to this as well, particularly the information around binge drinking,” she says.

“We all should reduce our alcohol consumption, if we can,” Wong says. Rana agrees. “We need to raise awareness among both women and men that, at times, it is easy to go above recommended low levels of alcohol use, and that doing so can increase their risk for heart disease,” he says.

35-year-old man accused of motor vehicle homicide after driving drunk pleads not guilty

Written by Jake Anderson

OMAHA, Neb. —A man accused of driving drunk at the time of a deadly crash in Bennington pled not guilty.

Joshua Kuhl, 35, is charged with motor vehicle homicide for his role in the crash that killed 69-year-old Gary Smith in February.

Authorities said Kuhl was driving drunk in his truck when he allegedly failed to stop at a stop sign and hit a vehicle, killing one person and hurting three others.

According to an arrest warrant, Kuhl had twice the legal limit of alcohol in his system.

Records show Kuhl had his license revoked for one year due to a DUI conviction in Douglas County.

Kuhl's bond was set at \$1 million in February.

Omaha police name man arrested after shots fired outside Old Market bar

Written by McKenzy Parsons

OMAHA, Neb. —Omaha police named the man accused of firing a gun into the air outside an Old Market bar Saturday night.

Police say officers heard shots fired in the area of Billy Frogg's Grill & Bar on Howard Street. They say officers saw Henry Royal, 29, fire approximately eight rounds into the air. An officer arrested Royal, of Elkhart, Indiana, after allegedly seeing the gun in his pocket.

No one was hurt, but investigators say one of the bullets damaged the window of an apartment above the bar.

Royal was booked for unlawful discharge, firing a gun at an occupied dwelling and use of a weapon to commit a felony.

Sheriff, police crack down on parking lot gatherings in Omaha

Written by Mike McKnight

OMAHA, Neb. (WOWT) - After 9 p.m., drivers and riders started gathering near 114th and Dodge in Omaha, with plenty of passengers along to join the crowd, which grew as social media messages spread and activity revved up.

The driver of a sporty car, who won't be identified, says he came out of curiosity, looking for some innocent fun.

"There's a time and a place for it, but as long as we're not hurting anyone or doing anything bad, I think it should be fun," the driver said.

6 News witnessed a few fast drivers and riders buzzing close to the crowd with a couple of vehicles, including a pickup spinning cookies in the parking lot of a strip mall under renovation.

The skid marks show the tight spins the drivers are making, and the Douglas County Sheriff's Office is concerned looking at the video footage of all the people gathering around, thinking that eventually, someone is going to get hurt.

In a joint operation, Omaha Police officers and Douglas County deputies — some in unmarked cruisers — moved in to herd the crowd out of the parking lot. OPD's Able 1 helicopter flew above as part of the message that law enforcement won't allow these gatherings that might get out of hand.

"When you got all these vehicles doing a parking lot takeover, they're not giving safe observation distance between the dangerous driving activity and themselves," said Douglas County Sheriff Aaron Hanson. "This will result in serious injury or a fatality, and that's why we're working so hard to disrupt it."

6 News' video of the Friday gathering was used as a lesson in Monday's class at Cornhusker Driving School.

"They went in the parking lot and started doing donuts," said Tony Venditte, a driving instructor. "They think they know how to control the car when it's spinning out and doing these types of things, but truthfully, you need a lot of training."

Among the 28 high school students learning safe driving skills, the donut spinning draws different reactions.

"He was just driving in a circle making a bunch of smoke," said one student.

The gathering of cars and motorcycles was dispersed, but not stopped, and the sheriff says they'll move across county or state lines, but law enforcement is paying special attention no matter where the crowd goes.

"We are getting information and tips from people in these groups that are giving us an advanced notice on where these groups are meeting up so we can disrupt them before the dangerous and potentially deadly behavior occurs," Hanson said.

The Douglas County Sheriff's Community Action Team has been focused on groups involved in careless driving. During a six-day special operation, deputies conducted 51 traffic stops and responded to more than two dozen complaints of street racing.

The following is the breakdown of citations:

- Speeding - 23
- Vehicle lighting violation - 5
- DUI - 1
- Stop light - 2
- No insurance - 2
- Loud muffler - 3
- Registration - 10
- No license - 3
- Careless driving - 1
- Drag racing - 2
- Window tint - 2
- Signal violation - 1

Throwback Arcade Lounge to rebrand, asks Nebraska Liquor Control Commission to remove license restrictions

Written by Jessica Perez

OMAHA, Neb. — The Throwback Arcade Lounge appeared before the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission with a request to remove some of the restrictions on its liquor license as it looks to re-brand.

The club will now go by Krush Lounge.

It closed in February for a remodel and hopes to reopen in two weeks.

Co-owner Tony Pham hopes to reach a different clientele.

"We're targeting more of a higher end, classier a lot of bright colors, flowers, we've elevated our food, so it's more of a restaurant now," Pham said.

The change follows a battle with the city of Omaha over the renewal of the club's liquor license last year.

Police, neighbors and city council members raised concerns about large crowds gathering outside and fights breaking out.

Police cited 16 tavern reports since the club's opening in 2020.

The Nebraska Liquor Control Commission renewed the club's license with several restrictions.

Those include not having promoters, security to disperse crowds and closing early at 1 a.m.

With the new business model, Pham hoped to close later and have things like comedy shows booked by professionals rather than promoters. He said the majority of their revenue is made between 12:30 p.m. and 2 a.m.

"With us opening this new venue, with us closing at 1, that eliminates the majority of our revenue and sets us up for failure," Pham said.

City Attorney David Grauman asked commissioners to keep restrictions in place for another three months.

"We feel it could be a useful time period to observe and ensure they can be a good neighbor and responsible business owner," Grauman said.

Commissioner Bruce Bailey expressed concerns about removing the restrictions, so Pham asked for a compromise like closing at 1:30 a.m. instead.

Executive Director of the commission Hobert Rupe said commissioners will take all the options into consideration and issue a decision later.

"They requested we reconsider; their theory is a, for the three or four months they were open, they didn't have any violations and b, by doing the remodeling and rebranding, they think they're going to address a lot of those concerns," Rupe said.

As of 4:30 p.m. Tuesday, Pham said he hadn't received notification of a decision.

Omaha city council member Danny Begley said he'd like to see all the restrictions remain in place.

Eat the Worm also went before the commission during a mandatory hearing to discuss crowds outside the bar.

Omaha Police brought concerns to the liquor commission after fights broke out on February 24.

The commission cited an officer's report, which said they observed 50 people running away from the building and about 50 patrons still in the bar, almost all engaged in a fight.

The owner Lance Wang said that the report is exaggerated.

"They're saying tables were toppled over, this isn't our first time running this business, our tables are bolted to the floor, tables were not turned," Wang said.

He said there were two small altercations as people were being told to exit the building.

He offered a security video as evidence.

Wang said his security broke up the first one with pepper spray, and employees called 911.

This brought a large police presence as an employee said one of the patrons possibly had a weapon.

Wang said as more officers arrived on scene, another fight broke out.

Since then, he's updated security measures like additional cameras and ID scanners so people can be identified if they cause trouble.

He's also banning troublemakers from the bar.

The commission said it liked Wang's productivity and felt he was on the right track.

Rupe said crowds in the old market have been an ongoing problem as people pick hang-out spots and spread the message on social media.

Study suggests closing bars early reduces late-night crime

Written by Justin Boggs

A new study published in JAMA Internal Medicine on Monday indicates that cutting late-night alcohol sales cut violent crime in a Baltimore neighborhood.

The study authored by Boston University researchers suggests that late-night violent crimes declined by 23% in Baltimore's Old East community after reducing the time alcohol is served by seven hours daily. Previously, establishments could sell alcohol from 6 a.m. to 2 a.m.

Legislation passed in Maryland's legislature changed the hours alcohol could be served in the community to 9 a.m. through 10 p.m. The change had an immediate effect on violent crime, researchers said.

The researchers defined late-night as 8 p.m. to 4 a.m. They examined crime around 26 bars and taverns that had their hours changed by the legislation, and compared them to 41 establishments that had no change in hours in neighborhoods with similar demographics.

“Our study provides new and compelling evidence that supports the World Health Organization’s three ‘best buys’ to reduce alcohol attributable morbidity and mortality through reducing availability of alcoholic beverages, along with increasing prices via taxation and banning alcohol marketing,” says study senior author Ziming Xuan. “These findings highlight the critical importance of population-based alcohol policies in violence prevention.”

The researchers claim that the reduction in crime saved the city over \$18 million a year. They said that the earlier closures had a larger impact on homicides.

One caveat is that the study was conducted amid a rise in crime associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Researchers noted a dramatic increase in crime in other neighborhoods while crime in the Old East area remained around the same.

“Changing the hours of service and sale of alcohol is a relatively simple intervention,” said study co-author David Jernigan. “Yet our findings suggest that, even in a period like the COVID-19 pandemic when alcohol consumption was rising, this policy has great promise for other cities and neighborhoods seeking to prevent and reduce crime.”

Beer at Nebraska baseball games this year unlikely as revenue-sharing issues arise with Lincoln Saltdogs

Written by Evan Bland

Cold beer won't be part of Nebraska baseball games this spring after all.

Despite recent optimism among Husker leadership that alcohol sales at Haymarket Park could become a reality for the stretch run of the season, the topic almost certainly won't even reach a Board of Regents vote later this month.

The hang-up arose in revenue-sharing discussions with Nebco Inc., which owns the other ballpark tenant in the Lincoln Saltdogs, an independent professional team. Nebraska offered a 50-50 split on its alcohol sales, while Nebco stayed firm that it wanted 90% of the take.

"The regents were pretty clear — we should at least get 50% of the net," said Doug Ewald, NU executive associate athletic director and chief financial officer. "Honestly, if I really read the contract, I'd argue we should get 100% of the net because it's a concession."

Multiple factors complicate the discussion. Nebraska has a 90-10 agreement for alcohol sales at Pinnacle Bank Arena, a deal the department moved forward with in part to secure additional transaction data to use for a future contract renewal. NU also doesn't pay any maintenance or capital construction costs at PBA — at Haymarket Park, it splits all such bills evenly with Nebco.

The Saltdogs have offered alcoholic beverages for more than two decades. On May days when their games follow Nebraska, they roll out beer carts and activate their own delivery systems in a matter of hours. The athletic department has also considered selling only cans — Creighton, for example, told Ewald 90% of its alcohol sales at baseball games are cans — but can't do so unilaterally because the Saltdogs control concessions.

The pro team awarded the contract to Premier Concessions in 2019. Nebraska keeps profits from its own concessions sales as the Saltdogs do from theirs.

The industry standards vary, with only sporadic public information readily available. A Forbes article from 2016 said schools commonly receive about 22% of the alcohol sales revenue when working with concessionaires. Minnesota football in 2013 renegotiated from 22.5% up to 35% after losing money in its first season in its new stadium. Tennessee football in 2021 evenly split alcohol sales venue with its partner. In both cases those teams own their own stadiums.

In the entertainment industry, it is common for a major music venue to keep 80-90% of sales revenue.

Saltdogs president Charlie Meyer on Thursday declined to speak in detail about the discussions.

"We're getting together internally to discuss the matter," Meyer said. "Any further conversations that we'll have (with Nebraska) — if they occur at all — need to occur after those meetings have taken place. We have nothing further to add at this time. We just don't negotiate our business deals through the media. Very sensitive negotiations. That's kind of where we're at, unfortunately."

The relationship between Nebraska, the Saltdogs and the City of Lincoln is unusual in its three-party nature. All agreed to a 35-year contract in 2000 with the city owning the land and ballpark while the two teams effectively run it and upgrade it together as they see fit.

The sides won't decide on term extensions until September 2034. Jim Abel has been the Saltdogs owner throughout while NU leadership has turned over multiple times since the park opened in June 2001.

"Good people over there to work with, that's for sure," Ewald said. "Appreciate the Abels and what they've done not only for baseball but the campus in general. But that's the reason I'm here because prior people inked bad deals. We love the facility and we want to be there. But there are some business terms at the end of the day that the Board of Regents have said we're not going to budge on."

Negotiations on Nebraska adding alcohol sales could theoretically resume at any time, Ewald said. For a deal to be in place this season, though, an agreement would need to happen by Friday ahead of the regents meeting April 19.

The athletic department has incorporated alcohol sales into other events already. The 2022 Big Ten wrestling tournament at Pinnacle Bank Arena was a landmark moment in that regard. PBA recently completed its second season offering drinks at Husker basketball games. Two Memorial Stadium events — the Garth Brooks concert in August 2021 and Volleyball Day in August 2023 — also offered beer.

"We've got to try to be collaborative and get to the right answer," Ewald said. "I don't know what it is that moves the needle — I'm hopeful we can get there down the road. But it's a little frustrating."