



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

OMAHA COALITION MEETING
Wednesday, September 21, 2022
9 a.m.

A G E N D A

- I. Welcome and Introductions
- II. Review of the August 10, 2022 Meeting Minutes
(please contact PEM staff with corrections)
- III. Key Takeaways from Alcohol Policy 19 Conference: Evidence to Action
 - a. Liene
 - b. Summer
 - c. Chris
- IV. Focus Area Updates
 - a. Local
 - i. We're moving!
 - b. Policy
 - i. September LCC Comments
 - c. Youth
 - i. Youth Leadership Retreat Summary
 - ii. Leadership Network – Next meeting: October 20th @ 7p
 - iii. Leadership Council – Next meeting: October 24th @ 7p
 - d. Awareness
 - i. September Research Summary available at www.projectextramile.org
- V. Additional Discussion/Announcements
- VI. Adjournment and Next Meeting Date: **October 12th, 9 a.m.**

IMPORTANT UPCOMING EVENTS

Nebraska Liquor Control Commission Hearings – October 4 & 5, 2022

The mission of Project Extra Mile is to advocate for evidence-based policies
and practices to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harms.

PROJECT EXTRA MILE

OMAHA METRO AREA COALITION MEETING MINUTES

August 10, 2022

- I. Call to Order: Chris Wagner called the meeting to order at 9 a.m.
- II. Welcome and Introductions: Welcome and introductions took place. Coalition members in attendance: Russ Zeeb, Hayden Romig, Palistene Gray-Moore, Sharona Crittenden, Lorelle Mueting, Tom Safranek, Don Hoes, Chris Foster, Margie Magnuson, Hobie Rupe, Andrea Frazier, Christie Abdul-Greene, and Alvin McCruel. Coalition members in attendance via Zoom: Lanette Richards, Jim Boucher, Jon Lucas, and Michaela Perry. Staff members: Chris Wagner, Beatha Kliewer, and Liene Topko.
- III. Nebraska Liquor Control Commission's Role in Preventing Alcohol-Related Harms: Hobie Rupe, executive director of the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission (LCC) shared about who the Commission is and what they do as well as who the current commissioners are. Mr. Rupe fielded a number of questions during his presentation, including: 1) When is the LCC going to get tough on cocktail-to-go containers (Magnuson)? Margie indicated that these containers are not "tamper-proof" by any stretch of the imagination. Hobie indicated that the LCC would be holding a formal hearing on this in the near future. 2) What is the status of the LCC's legislative letter and what will be in it (Wagner)? Hobie indicated that they are working on it now. It is likely to include the brand registration issue to better help the LCC know what alcohol is being brought into and sold in the state. He also mentioned he thought mandatory training would be included again. 3) What can be done to minimize the oversaturation of alcohol ads at licenses (Abdul-Greene)? Margie Magnuson mentioned that there are regulations that control the amount of ads that can cover windows. Hobie confirmed that there needs to be line-of-sight and that it's a public safety issue to be able to see what's going on inside the store.
- IV. Focus Area Updates
 - a. Local
 - i. Pastor McCruel thanked the Liquor Control Commission for its support in denying the liquor license for Walker Convenient Mart. He shared that he and his church were a part of that successful protest. However, he is now a part of a lawsuit as a result. Rupe explained that the applicant appealed the Commission's denial, and as a part of Nebraska statutes, all parties are named in the suit. The Attorney General's Office will argue the state's case in court.
 - ii. Chris Wagner expressed concerns for the "walk around" liquor license for the Nebraska State Fair and shared that PEM and other coalition partners shared concerns with the Commission during August 2nd's public presentation. The Commissioners voted 2-1 in favor of the SDL and the requested exemptions. Rupe clarified that the LCC was unaware how drastic the changes were going to be and that the application was submitted late. The State Fair Board is required to submit their application for 2023 by February 1st to ensure proper review by the LCC.

- iii. Wagner invited Dr. Tom Safranek to share more information about the op-ed he drafted following the Jell-O Shot Challenge in conjunction with the College World Series. Discussion ensued about the need to address promotions and what kind of restrictions currently exist. Rupe shared that the LCC had a proposed rule in the past to address this issue and that they may reconsider this rule to help prevent these types of promotions in the future.
 - b. Policy
 - i. Chris Wagner invited coalition members to join the next Policy Work Group meeting (August 18th) to further discuss how to educate local and statewide policymakers on the harms resulting from excessive alcohol consumption.
 - c. Enforcement
 - i. Liene Topko summarized the Summer 2022 compliance check results that were conducted in Cass, Douglas, and Sarpy Counties. Of the 192 businesses checked, 20 (10%) sold to the minor. She also shared that three or four businesses declined to sell due to serving a license suspension for a prior violation.
 - d. Youth
 - i. Chris Wagner informed the coalition that the Youth Leadership Retreat is going to be held virtually on August 20 & 27 and encouraged members to share with youth they know to register for the free event.
 - e. Awareness
 - i. The July & August Research Summaries are available at www.projectextramile.org/ResearchSummary
- V. Additional Discussion/Announcements: Sharona Crittenden with Sarpy County Diversion shared that the individuals they work with are unaware of what a standard alcoholic drink is. Discussion ensued regarding how craft beers are often higher than the traditional beer in alcohol by volume (ABV) and the need to educate the greater population on the topic. This lack of knowledge, in part, may be contributing to the many societal problems we are seeing, especially impaired driving.
- VI. Adjournment and Next Meeting Date: The meeting was adjourned at 10:30 a.m. The next meeting will take place in person at the National Safety Council at 9 am on Wednesday, September 21, 2022.

WHAT IS PAHOLA?



PAHOLA is the first digital health worker dedicated to alcohol-related topics, developed by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and launched in November 2021.

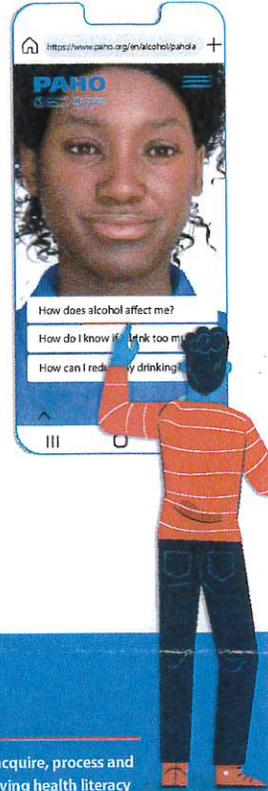
It can be accessed on PAHO's webpage, 24 hours per day, to an infinite number of users, from any device. The interaction with Pahola is anonymous and not identifiable. It is available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and French.

WHAT PAHOLA CAN DO?

- Provide evidence-based information about the impact of alcohol use on people's health.
- Assess people's risk from their drinking using a standardized questionnaire.
- Guide individuals at risk to develop a change plan to reduce or abstain from their drinking.
- Guide individuals who want to help a loved one with an alcohol-related problem.
- Refer individuals at high risk of alcohol-related problems to treatment and support in their own countries.
- Provide support free from alcohol-related stigma.

HOW DOES PAHOLA WORK?

- Pahola is based on artificial intelligence and can autonomously and empathetically interact with users on a variety of alcohol-related topics.
- Pahola was trained with conversation dialogues developed by PAHO in consultation with alcohol experts. More than 150 different topics were used to develop Pahola to work on alcohol health literacy, as well as to assess users' risks and guide them through a change plan.
- Its abilities to interact empathetically with users come from a "digital brain" that is based on neuroscience, in addition to the latest technology.
- Pahola uses language processing software to interpret the users' requests and manifest specific expressions.



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO IMPROVE ALCOHOL HEALTH LITERACY?

Alcohol health literacy is related to the idea of individuals being capable to acquire, process and understand knowledge on different alcohol topics. The advantages of improving health literacy include (1):

- Increase people's knowledge on alcohol content and strength, and the impact of alcohol use on their health.
- Empower people to critically think about the influence of alcohol marketing and media messages on their alcohol consumption and how to counteract them.
- Support the understanding of how alcohol is accepted in societies and how people can act collectively to advance alcohol policies that control its use and harms.

SCALING UP BRIEF INTERVENTIONS TO REDUCE ALCOHOL-RELATED PROBLEMS

- Screening and brief interventions (SBI) for individuals with high-risk alcohol use is one of the key alcohol policies recommended to reduce the harmful use of alcohol.
- Efficacy and effectiveness studies of SBI in primary care settings found a consistent decrease in self-reporting of drinking.
- While implementation of SBI remains a challenge in primary health care, Pahola could potentially increase its delivery, to complement health services and ease the burden of health professionals.
- Evidence shows that digital interventions seem to lower alcohol consumption in a similar level as face-to-face SBI.

WHAT IS THE FUTURE FOR PAHOLA?

PAHO will continue to work on its developments and revisions to ensure better usability and engagement, and to facilitate research to assess its efficacy and cost-effectiveness.

Pahola could become a global public health good easily adaptable to the needs of various health systems and in a variety of settings, and it can serve as a model for other conditions.

Talk to Pahola today: <https://www.paho.org/en/alcohol/pahola>

PAHO/NMH/MH/22-0014
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References
1. Olan O, Richards G, Sykes S, Willis J. Shaping alcohol health literacy: A systematic concept analysis and review. *Health Lit Res Pract.* 2020;Jan 14(4):193-200. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.33928/247483107-20191104-01>. Eriatum in: *Health Lit Res Pract.*





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

- Thank you for supporting the following in recent legislative letters. We hope you include them in the 2023 letter:
 - Mandatory Training
 - Alcohol Impact Zones
 - Expanding the use of mandatory days of closure
 - Minimum pricing
- I would like to focus my comments on the need to increase alcohol taxes in our state.
- Low prices lead to increased consumption. As an organization, our main concern is with the increased excessive consumption that leads to so many socio-economic costs in our state.
- DHHS published a substance use state profile in 2017 that found:
 - Alcohol use killed an estimated 703 Nebraskans in 2015 and led to over 2,400 hospitalizations in 2014
 - 1/3 of all fatal motor vehicle crashes in 2015 involved alcohol (66)
 - 778 alcohol-involved crashes resulted in at least one injury
- Research indicates that we are the 2nd worst self-reported DUI state in the country with 955 episodes per 1,000 population
- Researchers found that the # of alcohol-related deaths increased by 25% during the first year of COVID
- We have and will continue to share this information with senators, but our state desperately needs you to do the same and push policymakers towards evidence-based policies.
- Increasing alcohol taxes has the strongest evidence in terms of its efficacy to reduce excessive consumption and its harms like those listed above for Nebraska.
- An alcohol tax increase in IL in 2009 resulted in a 26% reduction fatal alcohol-related crashes and significant reductions in sexually transmitted infection rates.
- A 3% alcohol sales tax increase in MD led to similar results as well as a 12% reduction in alcohol-positive drivers aged 15-34.
- Not only will increased taxes increase revenue and decrease community harms, but they will also help our economy, which experiences over \$1 billion in economic costs each year due to excessive consumption (primary costs include lost work productivity, increased healthcare costs, and increased corrections costs). Nebraska taxpayers are on the hook for nearly \$500 million of those costs, which stands in stark contrast to the approximately \$35 million in alcohol tax revenues that the state received last year.
- Please consider expanding previous legislative letter items related to the farm winery excise tax rate to call for all alcohol tax rates to be increased across the board. These rates have not been increased since 2003 and have lost a significant amount of value due to inflation.

Youth Leadership Network

Register before the meeting
using the QR code below or at
<https://rb.gy/z5lwl6>



Omaha-Metro area students in
grades 8-12 are invited to join!



THURSDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2022
7:30 PM - 8:30 PM
**UNO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
CENTER**

Youth@projectextramile.org
Questions? Text 402-577-0094



RESEARCH SUMMARY
Date Compiled: September 2022

Key takeaways from included research:

- A group of reservation-based American Indian (AI) adults were studied to determine whether individuals with higher rates of cultural protective factors would have lower rates of alcohol use while those with higher risk factors would have higher rates of alcohol use. Researchers concluded that cultural factors, such as enculturation, could be important to incorporate into treatment planning for AI adults because those with higher rates of cultural protective factors did have lower alcohol use rates.
- An eight-day study was conducted to examine sleep circadian timing and photoreceptor responsiveness in adult alcohol drinkers. Researchers found that adults who consumed alcohol heavily had later sleep timing and shorter dim light melatonin onset-midsleep intervals, which was consistent with prior studies. They also concluded that those same individuals also had reduced circadian photoreceptor responsiveness, which has only been studied among rodents previously.
- Researchers examined trends in prevalence of binge drinking and heavy alcohol consumption among pregnant and nonpregnant women. In this cross-sectional study, they found that both forms of excessive alcohol consumption were higher among nonpregnant women than pregnant women, however the average annual percentage change was significantly greater among pregnant women. Overall results suggest worsening behavioral risks among pregnant women.

Cracking down on alcohol sales to minors in Nebraska

Written by Jessica Salinas

Omaha, Neb. (KPTM) — Non-profit Project extra mile teamed up with law enforcement and some youth in our community to crack down on businesses selling alcohol to minors.

Overall, 20 (10%) out of 192 businesses checked in Cass, Douglas, and Sarpy counties over the last two months were cited for selling alcohol to minors.

One of the most important steps to keeping alcohol out of youth's hands is checking the ID. A vast majority (94%) of the 172 businesses that refused the sale did so after checking the minor's vertical ID, which indicates that they are not the legal age to purchase alcohol. Every state in the USA features vertical drivers licenses for youth under 21.

"All of the five businesses in Cass County that were cited did not bother to check the ID," said Project Extra Mile Executive Director Chris Wagner. "On the other hand, 77% of businesses that were cited in Douglas County checked the ID and still sold, so clearly checking it isn't enough. Businesses need to train their employees to verify the age as well. Minor IDs in Nebraska feature bold red letters that tell the clerk that the youth is under the legal age of 21."

Two of the businesses cited are facing enhanced penalties due to prior sales to minors within the last four years -- the time frame used by the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission (LCC) to assess penalties. The Mega Saver on Lawndale Drive was cited for its second sale to minor in the last two years and Aldi 42 was cited for its second violation within the last four years. Both businesses face mandatory days of closure (no alcohol sales allowed) and days of suspension, the latter which can be paid off as a fine at \$100 per day according to the LCC's penalty guidelines. Those businesses include:

- Aldi 42, 13215 W Center Rd, Omaha (3/19) -- facing up to 2 days of mandatory closure and 20 days of suspension;
- Mega Saver, 7205 Lawndale Dr, Omaha (4/21) -- facing up to 2 days of mandatory closure and 40 days of suspension.

"It's disappointing any sale really is" said Executive Director of Project Extra Mile, Chris Wagner.

The other 18 businesses are facing their first sale to a minor violation within the last four years. If found guilty by the LCC, these businesses could be facing 15-25 days of suspension that they could choose to pay off as a fine at \$50 per day in lieu of suspension. The five businesses listed below had previous sales to minor violations, but they fell outside of the four-year window that the LCC uses for determining progressive penalties:

- 75 Mart, 114 Rock Bluff Rd, Plattsmouth (6/06);
- 801 Chop House, 1403 Farnam St, Ste 102, Omaha (9/12);
- Guaca Maya, 5002 S 33rd St, Omaha (1/07; 9/07; 1/09);
- Kum & Go 367, 18908 Q St, Omaha (6/07; 4/17);
- Milt's Golf Center, 6402 Q St, Omaha (4/14).

30 officers from the Bellevue, La Vista, Omaha, and Plattsmouth Police Departments; the Douglas County Sheriff's Office; and the Nebraska State Patrol participated in the enhanced underage drinking enforcement effort.

To report underage drinking or adults providing alcohol to minors, call the statewide tip line at 1-866-Must-B-21 (687-8221). It's anonymous, and it's the right call. Individuals are urged to call 911 to report an underage drinking party in progress.

Heightened enforcements are supported by the Nebraska Department of Transportation - Highway Safety Office as well as the Strategic Prevention Framework - Partnerships for Success and the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block grants from SAMHSA through the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services and Region 6 Behavioral Healthcare. NDOT-HSO also funds the tip line. Project Extra Mile helped to coordinate the enforcement efforts.

Japan launches a contest to urge young people to drink more alcohol

Written by Bill Chappell

Young people turning away from alcohol is generally welcomed as a positive trend. But it's bad news both for booze companies, and governments that are watching lucrative alcohol tax revenues dry up along with the populace.

Japan's National Tax Agency is clearly concerned: It's taking an unorthodox approach to try to get young Japanese adults to drink more, in an online contest dubbed Sake Viva!

The project asks young people to submit business plans to lure a new generation into going on the sauce, saying Japan's sake, beer and liquor makers are facing challenges that the pandemic has made even worse.

Contest runs against Japan's non-drinking trend

Japan's alcohol consumption has been in a downward arc since the 1990s, according to the country's health ministry. In the past decade, the government adopted a sweeping plan to counter societal and health problems linked to alcohol, with a focus on reaching the relatively small portion of the population who were found to account for nearly 70% of Japan's total alcohol consumption.

Coronavirus restrictions have kept many people from visiting Japan's izakaya (pub) businesses, and people simply aren't drinking enough at home, the tax agency said.

"The domestic alcoholic beverage market is shrinking due to demographic changes such as the declining birthrate and aging population," as well as lifestyle shifts away from drinking, according to a website specially created for the contest.

New products that reflect the changing times; sales that use virtual "AI and Metaverse" concepts; promotions that leverage products' place of origin — those are just a few of the ideas the site lists as ways to get Japan's young adults to embrace alcohol.

Backlash hits the plan to boost alcohol businesses

The contest is aimed at "revitalizing the liquor industry and solving problems." But it has hit a sour note with many people online, prompting pointed questions about why a government that has previously encouraged people to drink responsibly or abstain is now asking for help in getting young people to drink more.

Writer and journalist Karyn Nishi highlighted the controversy, saying Japan was going in the opposite direction most modern governments are pursuing and stressing that alcohol is inherently dangerous. As discussions erupted about the contest on Twitter, one popular comment praised young people who aren't drinking, saying they believe the social costs imposed by alcohol aren't outweighed by tax revenues.

Critics also questioned the initiative's cost to taxpayers. The contest and website are being operated by Pasona Noentai, an agriculture and food-related arm of a massive Japanese corporation called Pasona Group.

The pro-drinking contest will run for months, ending this fall

The Sake Viva! contest is open to people from 20 to 39 years old, with submissions due on Sept. 9. An email to contest organizers seeking comment and details about the number of entries was not answered before this story published.

Pro-drinking contest submissions that make it to the final round will be judged in person in Tokyo on Nov. 10.

The date underlines the dichotomy many now see in the government's alcohol policies: When Japan enacted the Basic Act on Measures against Alcohol-related Harm, it established a week devoted to raising alcohol abuse awareness, with a start date of Nov. 10.

'Worse than it looks.' Impaired drivers cause avoidable tragedies in Nebraska

Written by Mike Watkins

Even though it's been more than 10 years since Todd and Jaimi Calfee lost their daughter, Alexis, to an impaired driver, the wound of losing their first-born is still very fresh and raw.

"When we lost our daughter that fateful day, our lives were forever changed," Jaimi said. "The last 11 years have been difficult, a roller coaster. It's been hard to even breathe some days. We have struggled with depression, anger and sadness. We still try to numb our pain in so many ways."

The Calfees' story isn't unique in Nebraska or the U.S. It's a tale that continues to be told again and again, for a variety of reasons.

Here's some food for thought about impaired driving:

- Over 30% of fatality crashes in Nebraska are alcohol related.
- One person dies in drunk-driving crash every 45 minutes in the U.S.
- First offense can cost a driver about \$10,000 in fines and legal fees.
- One DUI could cost you your career, spouse or children.
- Nebraska maintains over 97% conviction rate for drivers arrested for DUI.
- Highest number of impaired crashes are ages 25-64.
- Drivers in impaired crashes are about 70% male.

And despite alcohol-related vehicle crashes continuing to decline in the past 20 years — from a high of 2,248 in 2002 to 1,534 in 2020 — it continues to be a significant problem in Nebraska.

According to Bill Kovarik, Highway Safety Administrator with the Nebraska Department of Transportation Highway Safety Office, the solution is simple in context but complicated in acceptance.

"This continues to be an issue that should not happen if drivers would just not drive after they have been drinking — it is a choice," Kovarik said. "For real change to happen, it needs to become totally socially unacceptable to drive impaired."

"Everyone needs to understand and help others understand that these tragedies do not need to happen. There are many options for impaired drivers before they crash and go to jail, lose money and careers or kill someone."

Such was the case with Alexis' killer in September 2011. A drunk driver who was off probation less than a month, he spent the evening of Sept. 9 at a bar in Jackson, Nebraska, before leaving to go fishing.

Impaired and under the influence, he missed his turn and hit Alexis and her boyfriend, Chris Oberg, when he crossed the center line on a two-lane road — killing them both.

"It wasn't his first, second, third, fourth, fifth or even sixth, but his seventh DUI — and this time he finally killed," Todd said. "He erased them off the face of the earth. He ended dreams, destroyed lives and broke hearts in a quick second."

“His blood alcohol level (BAC) was .196. He killed two promising kids with bright futures ahead of them, but he survived, as most drunk drivers do.”

So why do people who've been drinking or are under the influence of substances think they can get behind the wheel of a vehicle with no ramifications? Why do they feel the need to operate a many-thousand-pound vehicle and potentially turn it into a missile?

According to Kovarik, for some people, it's a disease. And even though they continue to drink or use impairing drugs — they continue to drive.

“For those who are closely impacted by the tragedy of impaired driving (a fatality or serious injury), their lives are changed forever which causes many to become advocates for sober driving,” he said. “Many people do not think it will happen to them or that they are different than the other drivers that are impaired when they drive.

“They rationalize driving impaired by believing they only drank a few, they are good at driving even after drinking, it's only a short drive, or many other excuses.”

The bottom line is — driving under the influence of alcohol or other drugs is a crime that does not need to happen.

“Their decisions and actions negatively impact many more people than just the one who is impaired,” Kovarik said. “It hurts worse than it looks. A DUI costs more than you think.

“If you are going to drink or use any impairing drugs — do not drive! One careless decision will be with you the rest of your life.”

The Calfees know the impact of impaired driving first-hand. They feel it every day.

“We all were just trying to survive – living in a revolving door, watching everyone else's life go on, while we were stuck, going in what felt like circles,” Jaimi said. “It was horrific. Eventually, we decided we would become bitter or better, and we chose better.”

Man suffers brain bleed after Wednesday incident outside Kearney bar

Written by Kearney Hub Staff

KEARNEY — A Kearney man suffered a brain bleed after being assaulted outside of a Kearney bar Wednesday morning.

The alleged assailant, Tommy Parks, 53, of Kearney is charged with felony first-degree assault in the incident. Court records outline the case against him:

Around 12:24 a.m. Wednesday Kearney Police Department officers responded to the Church Key bar at 1912 Central Ave. for a man with injuries from an assault. Police found a man lying on his back on the sidewalk and a large amount of blood coming from the back of his head.

The victim had a 1 1/2-inch long laceration and a large amount of swelling around the wound, records say. The victim was transported to Kearney Regional Medical Center and later to a Lincoln hospital.

A witness told police Parks, wearing no shirt and pajama pants, walked by the bar causing problems. The victim approached Parks and told him to “keep moving,” and Parks allegedly punched the victim in the face. The victim fell to the ground and hit his head on the concrete.

Parks was contacted three blocks from the incident, records say, and told police the victim confronted him, pushed him in the throat and punched him in the face. Parks told police he and the victim got into a physical fight before Parks left the area.

Records say there were no other witnesses who agreed with Parks’ version of the incident.

The investigation revealed moments before the incident, Parks and another man were yelling at each other outside the bar. Parks got into the victim’s face, and the victim put his arm on Parks’ chest to keep him away when the victim was allegedly punched in the face.

Parks was arrested and later charged. He is being held at the Buffalo County Jail on a \$10,000 bond.

Colorado man charged with cutting colleague's throat in Lincoln, police say

Written by Andrew Wegley

A 32-year-old Colorado man is in jail in Lincoln after police allege he cut his colleague's throat early Thursday morning after the two had been drinking at a local bar, according to court records.

Ever Lopez, of Aurora, Colorado, and two of his co-workers were driving back to their northeast Lincoln hotel at about 2:30 a.m. Thursday when Lopez, who was sitting in the backseat, allegedly cut the neck of his 47-year-old co-worker, Lincoln Police officers said in the affidavit for Lopez's arrest.

First responders found the victim with several small cuts on his upper body and a laceration to his throat, according to the affidavit. He was taken by ambulance to a local hospital.

After witnesses provided a description of Lopez, police found him hiding behind crates to the east of the hotel, near Superior Street and Cornhusker Highway.

He was taken to the Lancaster County Jail and later charged with second-degree assault.

Nebraska State Fair attendance up 8%, beats last pre-pandemic turnout

Written by Jeff Bahr

GRAND ISLAND — This year's Nebraska State Fair attracted 287,367 people over the course of its 11 days, an 8% increase over last year.

Attendance was also up from 2019, when 283,468 people attended in the last fair prior to the pandemic.

"The fair was amazing from our standpoint," said State Fair Executive Director Bill Ogg. The fair wrapped up a strong final weekend Monday.

The top-attended concert featured ventriloquist Jeff Dunham, who attracted 6,628 people Friday night. Saturday drew the biggest crowd through the gates at the fairgrounds in Grand Island.

Final concessions numbers were not available Tuesday, but through Sunday, food numbers were up 14% from a year ago, officials said. Carnival numbers were up 15%.

This year was the first time that fairgoers could carry alcoholic drinks around the fairgrounds.

Ogg said the system worked well.

"What our neighboring fairs have told us — the ones that have done it for decades — is that we would see fewer alcohol-related incidents and we would see increased sales."

Both of those predictions came true, Ogg said.

Many concessionaires and carnival people who have come to the Nebraska State Fair for years "say this was as strong and well-attended a fair as those years ago, where the reporting was in the mid-300,000s," Ogg said.

In 2017, the fair drew 379,108 people in a different method of tallying attendance. The 2018 figure was 314,805.

Nebraska State Patrol arrests more than 60 impaired drivers in two-week campaign

Written by KETV Staff

LINCOLN, Neb. — The Nebraska State Patrol arrested more than 60 impaired drivers during the latest Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over campaign.

The campaign, which ran from Aug. 19 to Sept. 5, led to troopers arresting 66 people for driving under the influence, according to the Nebraska State Patrol.

“This has been a busy summer on Nebraska roadways,” Col. John Bolduc, superintendent of the Nebraska State Patrol, said in a statement. “Our troopers and dispatchers have been working day and night to keep Nebraskans and our visitors safe. As the summer driving season ends, we encourage all motorists to also do their part to keep our roads safe.”

Troopers also issued 1,217 citations for speeding, 91 for driving under suspension, 37 for open alcohol container, 27 for minor in possession of alcohol, 63 for no proof of insurance, 24 for no seat belt and 22 for improper child restraint.

Column: Fun possible without alcohol

Written by Josh Salmon

I don't know why many associate alcohol with a good time. Some also think that fun is impossible without alcohol. News flash, fun is very capable without alcohol. I have done it for a long time.

Beer commercials show fun and beer going together, people smiling, and all is well. They should really show a drunk idiot table dancing at a family reunion, or a drunk being so obnoxious that nobody wants to be around him. The latter is my experiences with the drinking scene people I have been around.

I don't care if you need to come home from work and have one or two after a long day, I get that. Some days I have had lately, I have felt that way, but I don't drink. I did many years ago, but even then barely. I never enjoyed the taste or the atmosphere. I would have two drinks last five hours. Not my thing. Most of the time I would just sit there talking to my friends which I could do for free anywhere else.

Back in the day, and even now, the only way I go into a bar is if there is karaoke. That's it. I usually try to leave early to so I don't compete with the inebriated drivers who think they can drive home.

I have been the DD, or designated driver, a few times. That sometimes just ends up me babysitting a grownup who made bad decisions and now is my problem. Thanks, but no thanks. Been there, done that several times.

I have many friends who also can have a fun time without alcohol being around. We used to do game night and play board games with food and soda. I go to ball games and have a soda. I can have a barbeque or gathering and be alcohol free. The list goes on and on.

I didn't even want alcohol at my wedding but that ended up not being the case. One of the reasons I quit being a DJ at weddings by the way. That is another column for another time.

Let's take the Husker football games. Currently, alcohol is not sold at the games yet 80,000 plus fans can still have fun. Sure, some imbibe in adult beverages during the tailgate prior to kickoff. These fans go three hours or more without alcohol. It makes a more family friendly environment and more fun. Now they want to change that?

How many drunk idiots have I sat by at baseball games, many. Not my choice. You can't walk up to the ticket window and ask for a seat in the sober section. Great idea though.

I have also seen adult softball leagues where they allow beer in the dugout during the game. Really? You can't go an hour without a brew; you may need to go to a meeting. If you want to play softball, play. If you want to drink, go home.

I don't like when people advertise an event and say a fun family atmosphere then mention there will be booze. That is not family friendly. Having drunk idiots making inappropriate comments to you is not my idea of family fun.

I avoid most activities or gatherings with alcohol because of bad experiences in the past no matter how low key they may be. I will do some other activity that night that is fun, and do it sober, so I remember it the next day that way.

Remember, life is not actually like beer commercials.