

TAPPED OUT

by Bridget Bailey

IOWA CITY OFFICIALS ARE CONSIDERING A BAN ON ALCOHOL SPECIALS IN BARS.

Put the books away and forget classes; it's the weekend. But if you're looking forward to a getaway to Iowa City for its drink specials and 19-and-older bars, think again. The days of bars full of freshmen and too-good-to-be-true alcohol deals might be over.

The Iowa City Council is considering a ban on most alcohol specials and imposing far stricter laws to keep the under-21 crowd from boozing it up at University of Iowa bars. The issue has been a hot topic of debate for nearly a

year, with city officials insisting that students have gotten out of hand.

Iowa City Mayor Ernie Lehman says he hopes the council will go forward with the ban. "Specials are probably the most irresponsible advertising I've ever seen." Lehman says the ban could prohibit buying more than one drink at a time, pitchers, and alcohol prizes.

In a first reading, the Iowa City Council voted unanimously April 3 to ban buying three drinks or more at once, selling pitchers without seeing ID from everyone who wants a glass, happy hours, and all-you-can-drink specials. The ordinance would allow the city to take civil action against bars that get caught serving minors. Council members would have to approve the ordinance two more times for it to become law.

"We will without a doubt prohibit all-you-can-drink specials," Lehman says. About the limit on the number of drinks that can be bought at one time, he says bartenders should know "if the customer is coherent after buying five drinks singly. You can't do that if a person buys five at a time."

The council could take a third vote on the restrictions by early May and, if passed, they could be in effect by early summer. There's a lot of U of I students who hope the new laws never go into effect.

"There is no way that it will happen, and even if it does, it won't help because students will just pay more for alcohol," says Lathe Toft, 20, U of I sophomore in nursing.

Megan Adams, 21, U of I junior in political science, history, and art history, says the ban might sour relations between the Iowa City community and the university.

"As a student, I think the ban is a ludicrous idea," Adams says. "I think by putting a ban on the drinking specials, the problem is just going to move to off-campus parties, and that will make the community hate us even more."

Adams is a member of the U of I Student

Government and says surveys compiled by the government body show that students are divided on the ban issue. But police, university, and city officials are in agreement: Something is not working with the current policies.

Lynn Walding, chief of the Iowa Alcoholic Beverages Division, says U of I leads other state universities in alcohol consumption.

Walding says that during the last school year, adults in Johnson County, which includes Iowa City, consumed 144,043 gallons of alcohol, which figures out to be a whopping 2.18 gallons per person. In Black Hawk County and Story County, the respective averages for University of Northern Iowa and Iowa State were 2.09 and 1.88 gallons per person. Though each of these averages is well above the 1.47 gallons per person state average, the U of I clearly leads the boozy pack.

Steve Parrott, U of I spokesman, says alcohol is a major concern for the university because of its far-reaching consequences. The drunk sophomore returning home to his dorm after last call hurts both himself and everyone he wakes up in the middle of the night.

"Binge drinking is up," Parrott says. "Over 90 percent of our students have been affected by binge drinking."

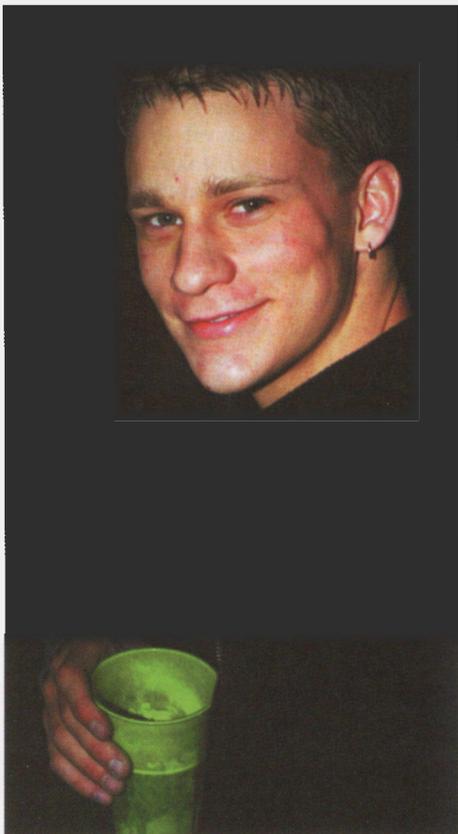
Parrot says one of the university's goals is to provide more alcohol-free, late-night entertainment. Iowa State and the Ames business community tried similar steps in the past, like the Weekend Club and the juice dance bar where Sips is now located. They didn't work.

Iowa City councilwoman Connie Champion says the problem is not really the drinking, it's everything that comes along with it that has spurred the council to take action.

"We are not necessarily trying to stop people from drinking, but trying to stop the drunkenness, jeering, and vandalism," Champion says.

Champion doesn't know if the ban would curb underage drinking, but she thinks increasing fines will make bar owners more responsible.

Fines for alcohol are controlled by the state, says Eleanor Dilkes, Iowa City attorney. Dilkes says underage drinking is a simple misde-





meanor with a maximum penalty of \$500 and a minimum of \$50. Right now, state law says underage first offense is \$100 and the second is \$200 with an added bonus of a one-year driver's license suspension. An employee of a bar who gets nabbed selling to a minor receives a \$500 fine, while the license holder of the bar is issued a hefty \$1,500 ticket.

Iowa City police Sgt. Mike Brotherton is hoping these fines and a ban on specials will force drinkers to be more careful. "We want kids to go downtown and have a good time. If we didn't write tickets, there would be high school kids there," Brotherton says.

"We're trying to stop binge drinking that leads to violence," he says. "We hate to see fights break out — we had an incident recently where a broken bottle hit a girl's face, and she had to get 65 stitches.

"We want to sort of instill more responsibility in the people who operate these [bars]."

The Fieldhouse Bar and Grill in Iowa City is one of the bars that admits minors. The large 18-and-over dance club is a traditional hot spot for underage bar goers, though for months they have been paying cover charges as steep as \$10, while the City Council hashes out ways to control underage drinking.

Mike McConnell, Fieldhouse general manager, says he agrees with the goal of the ban, just not the ban itself. "There are some goods and some bads to it," McConnell

says. "I don't think it's the answer."

The Fieldhouse doesn't offer some of the targeted specials, like twofers, but it does have other specials that would be affected, especially those on pitchers. McConnell says if a ban is passed, he will have to evaluate the situation and figure out what to do next.

Don Stalkfeet, owner of the Sports Column, a downtown 21-and-over Iowa City bar, fully supports the ban.

"I think it's a good idea," Stalkfeet says, adding that although he opposes the new regulations in principle, he would like to see binge drinking curbed. Dollar pitchers and 10-cent draws are irresponsible advertising, he says.

"If people drink, they need to do so responsibly," Stalkfeet says. "It's like an all-you-can-eat buffet; we all overeat, over consume, and that's what we're trying to alleviate."

U of I students aren't the only ones that have been accused of over consumption. Ames has its fair share of insanely cheap pitchers of beer and all-you-can-drink specials, but not to worry.

The prospects of the Ames City Council cracking down on drink specials is remote, especially since the lengthy debate over whether to ban smoking in bars and restaurants was finally settled in early March.

Ames Police Cpl. Rollie Link patrols Campustown bars, and he says violence rarely flares up, though binge drinking cer-

tainly has a presence.

"I don't know how [a drink special ban] would help things," Link says. "I'm going to wait and see what Iowa City does, and what effect it [the ban] has."

Brian Asproth, 22, ISU senior in exercise and sport science, doubts a ban would work in Ames. "People are going to drink whether they offer drink specials or not," Asproth says. "People usually drink before they go out to the bar anyway. During the week I think their business might drop, but I don't think the Thursday, Friday, or Saturday business will because it's the weekend."

Will anything really curb binge drinking? It's easy to see why both schools and cities want to try and sober up college students, but is there anything that actually works?

The same debate raged about Veishea for more than a decade before the tragic death of Uri Sellers forced former ISU President Martin Jischke's hand.

Who knows if Iowa City's council will feel pressured to prevent more alcohol-related violence as Jischke once did? U of I students could learn a lesson from those at Iowa State. No one believed that Veishea would ever really go "dry." Is another drinking ban in another college town really that unlikely? Time will tell.

Bridget Bailey is a sophomore in journalism from Everyly. She wrote "Farm Crisis in Iowa" for the February issue of Ethos.