

Opinion: Truckee has a drinking problem

By Adam McGill

As your police chief, I'm frustrated. More than a year ago, I wrote to you regarding our community culture surrounding the use of alcohol. I received a great deal of positive remarks and many people have shared with me they changed their behavior in light of learning more about our alcohol use and its impacts.



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I was encouraged and remained committed that we can do more. Yet the symptoms of this issue continue to cross my desk almost daily. I can't ignore that rarely a day goes by that we do not arrest a local resident for driving under the influence or drunk in public. Just in the last few days: One local overturned their vehicle while DUI, somehow escaping serious injury. Another local was driving in excess of 80 mph in the Glenshire Drive construction zone, passing vehicles, all while under the influence with two children in the vehicle, one of which not even belonging to the driver. A third was so drunk inside a downtown bar that officers had to carry the individual out.

These examples are not rare. Similar situations have occurred throughout 2014. Somehow, none of this year's events has led to serious injury or death. Our luck will run out.

Despite an enormous effort in prevention and education by Truckee Police Department and many others in the community, arrests for alcohol related offenses continue to climb. We are on pace for more than double the number of DUI arrests in 2014 as compared to 2013. The same is true for people arrested for being so drunk in a public place that they cannot care for themselves. Most of these arrests are locals, your neighbors, people you know and care for. The police cannot solve this issue through arrests alone. Only a community can change this cycle.

Several studies show residents of Truckee-Tahoe are healthier and happier than most of the U.S. population. We exercise more, we smoke less tobacco, we have better nutrition, and we're outdoors more. These same studies indicate we also consume 25 percent more alcohol and in higher amounts than the average U.S. population. The people here are tough, resilient, and fully capable of enacting change to our culture surrounding the use of alcohol. What is preventing us from doing so?

You can start today to enact change by discussing this issue with your friends, neighbors, co-workers, and children. Did you know Truckee kids report the No. 1 reason they choose not to drink is because they don't want to disappoint their parents? Did you also know that Truckee kids report they frequently drive in a vehicle with an adult who has been drinking alcohol? What adults say and do matters.

Contrary as it may seem to some, I am not against drinking alcohol. I am not advocating for prohibition to return in Truckee. Alcohol is perfectly acceptable and even enjoyable at the right time and place, but drinking in excess or getting behind the wheel of a car isn't just your issue – your choices can have consequences for everyone else and it is my job to do all that I can to protect everyone, including many times, people from themselves. Calling attention to a community safety issue is my obligation.

What will be our tipping point? Will it be the death of an innocent child? The time to act is now, before the tragedy. The police will continue to arrest people but that will not change the culture of our community. Let's work together. Let's make it nearly impossible for my officers to find a DUI. Let's make arrests a rarity and not the norm. Only we can make a fundamental change of what is acceptable behavior and what is not. There is no middle ground on this issue.

Will you stand with us and say enough is enough? To learn more go online.

Adam McGill is Truckee's chief of police.