Alcohol a problem on high school campus

By CARL REDMAN
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The woman put three containers on the table. They looked rather ordinary: a small deodorant container, a bottle of hand lotion and a pump bottle of hair spray.

Each bore a label made famous by television and magazine ads. And each had been used by a high school student to smuggle alcohol onto campus.

"Some of them don't go to this much trouble," said Betty Stevenson, a drug adviser with the public schools' Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Program. "Some of them just use their fathers' flasks."

And some of them use the innocent trappings of youth. One sixth-grade girl was caught by her mother with a vacuum bottle full of Jack Daniels whiskey tucked into her Smurf lunch box.

Statistics show that teen-agers throughout the nation are turning to alcohol — their parents' drug of choice — and it appears that teens in Baton Rouge are no exception to the national trend.

"They tell us it's not a party if they don't have beer or whatever," said Ann Morgan, another drug adviser. "A lot of them talk about it all week long. This is what they look forward to. I was setting up a projector recently at one of my schools and three boys were in the room talking."

"It was the big topic — not just where they were going to get it and where they were going to drink it. The big topic was whether they would get Budweiser or Stroh's."

It's the way many teen-agers look at the situation — they wonder what you can do at a party if you don't drink, according to ADAPP drug adviser Boots McArdle.

"One of the problems is the pressure," ADAPP adviser Bunny Purvis said. "They tell me it would be easy if they could say 'No' just once. But if they go out on a Friday night, they might have to say no five, 10, 15 times. It gets easier to just say yes."

And the kids apparently are not sneaking around to do their drinking. Many parents tell their children that if they're going to drink, they want them to do it at home, ADAPP adviser Gerry Myer said.

"I know of keg parties where parents let their kids set up kegs in their homes and then charge admission to their friends," Mrs. Morgan said. "They even print flyers telling where the parties are and how much it costs to get in."

Mrs. Purvis knows first-hand about the keg parties — the kids have used some of her land to hold them.

"It wasn't long ago that she got wind that another keg party was planned for her property and she didn't like it. So, she called the people from whom she leases. The mother assured me that the keg party wasn't going to be on my property," Mrs. Purvis said. "Then she said, 'Let me go get the flyer,' and she went and got the flyer from her son. 'You turn off Airline at Bonfanti's. . . . And that's the sad part, that it's so accepted.'"

"The kids themselves are quick to point a finger at their own parents for not being more aggressive is trying to stop drinking among teen-agers, according to Myrtle Perkins, another ADAPP adviser.

One of the problems in South Louisiana is the heritage of drinking, Mrs. Morgan said. In some parts of South Louisiana, kids are given beer and can be found in barrooms when they are still mere adolescents, she said.

One of my concerns as a parent is that there is really no place for a kid to go," Mrs. Morgan said. "My house on a weekend looks like a recreation center. I don't mind that as long as they don't bring anything with them."

"It's a mistake for parents to let teen-agers equate their drinking habits with those of their parents," Mrs. McArdle said. "Kids need to understand that alcohol affects them differently, that they are more susceptible to alcoholism than adults, she said.

But getting the message across must be done carefully, she said.

"Anytime you preach at them, you just turn them off," Mrs. Stevenson said. "You might just as soon send them out and tell them to open the cooler."

But the message is starting to get through to some of the kids, Mrs. McArdle said.

She said one of the support groups she runs had a party without alcohol and the kids were amazed at the fun they had sober. And it made them realize that they couldn't remember many of the parties at which they got drunk.

"I guess I'm a positive thinker," Mrs. Stevenson said. "I think the real answer is in two areas: Parents have to start using pressure on each other. And the kids need to start using pressure on themselves to stop some of this. I don't have a tenth of the validity with any one of these kids that another kid has."