Attack on teen drinking outlined

By MIKE DUNNE
Advocate staff writer

A task force aimed at cutting into the availability of alcohol for minors outlined a three-fold attack Friday and plans to recommend changes in the parish ordinances within a month's time.

The committee, headed by Dr. Harold Brandt who is president of the local chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, is composed of local officials, representatives of several groups and those who sell alcohol.

The purpose of the group is "to stop the ease of juveniles getting drunk alcohol," Parish Attorney Lynn Williams said.

Brandt outlined his three-fold approach, which he later said sounded like solving a medical problem. The group agreed with his approach.

Brandt's outline is:

- Set up a primary plan to curtail minors from even walking into a store and trying to buy alcohol. Such a plan would include educational programs such as Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Program.
- A secondary level to notify those who do walk into a store to buy alcohol that they can not buy it. That would include such things as signs saying they will be checked for drivers licenses prior to purchase.
- A tertiary level, which would include enforcement. "How to make sure they are caught," Brandt said.

Operation Checkmate, which searched out drunken and drinking drivers, is no longer on the road and one potential way to catch underage drinking is now lost, Brandt said.

Brandt said that most youthful drinkers do their drinking in automobiles and the lack of a Checkmate-type program is a great loss.

The committee must also look at how to prevent the recurrence of alcohol purchase once a teen-ager is caught.

That will be one area that will present a problem, Family Court Judge Jennifer Luke said.

Minors can not have fines imposed on them and must instead be put on probation or such retribution as community service.

A youthful offender of the purchasing laws is "not a common occurrence to find in Family Court... I haven't seen one since June," where she took the bench, she said. Other Family Court judges may have had much experience since each spends one day a week on juvenile cases.

Brandt said the real challenge for the committee will be to find solutions that "would not burden the system or be unenforceable."

The problem is a hard one to solve, everyone agreed.

Representatives from Southland Corp., which runs 7-11 stores, and

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