A new Louisiana law requires everyone from grocery store clerks to waiters to have training in serving alcohol.

**Bar Codes**

A new state law will change the way alcohol is served.

Drinking in Louisiana may be a bit more restrictive, but safer—in the new millennium. From waiters to grocery store clerks, beverage servers in the state are scrambling to pass a new exam that will allow them to serve and sell booze—and to recognize when they shouldn’t.

A new law requiring anyone who serves or sells alcoholic beverages at retail establishments to carry a permit goes into effect Jan. 1. The law pushes customer safety to the front lines of bars and restaurants, expanding liability from owners—who already must have a permit to dispense and/or sell alcohol—to include those who serve it as well.

Anyone—bartenders, waiters, food servers, grocery store clerks—who serves alcoholic beverages or who is at the point of sale is required to pass the exam and carry a permit. The code will be enforced by the Louisiana Alcohol and Tobacco Control Commission. If caught serving underage or intoxicated persons, servers can be fined or suspended.

The Responsible Alcohol Vendor Program dictates that workers affected be trained and tested, which is no small task. About 70,000 to 100,000 people work in 13,000 licensed alcoholic beverage locations around the state, according to Murphy Painter, commissioner for the state office of Alcohol and Tobacco Control.

Servers are trained to recognize when people they are serving are beginning to get drunk, taught how to slow service to those customers and how to tactfully cease serving them when the server deems the customers have had too much to drink.

Mary Weber, senior vice president of the Louisiana Restaurant Association, says that as one of about 80 training providers in the state, the organization has certified about 10,000 persons statewide. Weber says she believes that overall the new law is good. “It’s just being responsible,” she says. “It’s better to take a proactive stance.” The key issue, says Weber is that the server now shares the responsibility.

“‘It’s just being responsible. It’s better to take a proactive stance.’”

—Mary Weber

Brett Dickinson, owner of The Bank and The Bar at 500 Jefferson, says all of his employees have the new permits and are ready for the new year. Terri Krieg, house manager, says the new permit is in addition to the bar card that has been required by the parish for years. That card, according to Krieg, has different classes for people who work in restaurants and bars—and those who work in convenience or grocery stores. The new one doesn’t.

The training takes about two hours, according to Krieg, and afterward, workers must pass 70 percent of the 20 questions on the test. She says it is renewable every two years.

Being responsible for patrons is nothing new to Cynthia Joubert, day manager of Sidebar. She says they watch out for them because it’s the right thing: “You should feel some responsibility for the patrons you’re serving. It should be the natural thing to do,” Joubert stresses.

So is the test difficult? Says Krieg: “Basically, if you paid attention during class, there was no reason to miss the questions.”

—STELLA C. BEECH