New laws go into effect next Tuesday
Last call on The Strip for some

By Dan McCaleb
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It will be the last call for alcohol this weekend for a number of McKinley Street Strip bar patrons.

A new state law goes into effect next Tuesday that prohibits businesses from selling alcoholic beverages to anyone under 21 years of age. The law is expected to dramatically change the character of one of Lafayette's most storied and active night spots.

“New law, new concept, new ideas, new music,” Wynn Carbo, owner of Maco's on McKinley Street, said. “The new law is a major card in the game we play, so we’re going to adapt with it. We’re going to be looking to attract an older crowd.”

Because of its vicinity to USL, the Strip clubs have attracted a lot of college-aged students, most of whom are under 21. But the 18, 19, and 20-year-olds who previously accounted for a good portion of the business at these bars will no longer be able to purchase or consume alcohol there. And that means the clubs will have to adapt to stay competitive.

“The competition for the 21 and over crowd is going to be very intense,” Hans Peckhaus, general manager of Nite Caps, said. “It will be interesting to see how it turns out the first few weeks.”

The new state law allows the owners of bars in municipalities that don't regulate otherwise to decide on their own whether to admit 18-to-20-year-olds. The law just prevents the clubs from selling alcohol to minors.

“We’re going to allow 18, 19 and 20-year-old girls in, but not the guys,” said Shannon Allen, public relations manager at The Keg on the Strip. “We thought long and hard about it, and it was a tough decision, but we think that best suits our club.”

The owners and operators of all of the Strip clubs interviewed by The Advertiser this week said holding onto their liquor licenses was a top priority. Jeopardizing that by allowing under-age drinking simply is not acceptable, they said.

“That’s one of the reasons why we decided to let in the (18-to-20-year-old) girls and not the guys,” Allen said. “From our experience, the girls generally aren’t as concerned about getting alcohol as the guys are. We will have a college

Please see The Strip, A-8
night Thursdays for the guys, but that will be it.”

Peckhaus said all 18- to 20-year-olds will be allowed into Nite Caps. Patrons over 21 must wear wrist bands, and those under 21 will have their hands stamped, he said.

Managers of The Bulldog, Shanahan’s and the Metropolis Club on Jefferson Street said they probably also would experiment with marking systems to allow the younger patrons in. Nite Caps and other clubs also plan to increase security to make sure that those under 21 do not drink.

“We’re going to make it as convenient as possible for everyone over 21, and as inconvenient as possible for everyone under 21 to drink,” Peckhaus said. “We’ll be extremely hawkish about people pouring drinks into other glasses, taking off wrist bands, removing under 21 stamps. Basically, we’re not going to put up with any of it. We have no desire to lose our liquor license.”

Lafayette Police plan to enforce the new law as soon as it takes effect Tuesday. Business violators face fines and suspension of licenses if they are caught serving those under 21. Minors caught breaking the law face fines and possible jail time.

“Our police will enforce the law,” Mayor Kenny Bowen said this week. “This law was passed by the Legislature to protect the lives and safety of our youth. Strict enforcement will guarantee this objective.”

Earlier this year, the Legislature changed the law by closing a loophole in it. The loophole allowed businesses to sell alcohol to anyone 18 or older, but prohibited anyone from 18 to 21 from purchasing it. Even though by law those 18 to 20 weren’t supposed to drink, the loophole prevented enforcement of it. Not anymore.

Maco’s has been closed the past couple of weeks, Carbo said, to prepare for the club’s new identity. He even suggested that when Maco’s reopens up later this month, it may be under a new name.

“Maco’s has been here for 10 years, it’s time to move to something different,” he said. “We won’t be open when the law first goes into effect, but I will monitor how it affects the other clubs.”

Maco’s probably will allow 18- to 20-year-olds in when it reopens, using a similar kind of marking system as other clubs to distinguish between drinking and non-drinking customers.

“But we’re going to be selective about who we let in,” Carbo said. “If you get drunk at your dorm room or in your car and try to enter our place already intoxicated, that’s not going to happen. If you act properly and appropriately, then we won’t have a problem.”

Peckhaus said Nite Caps will offer alternative drinks that are high in caffeine or other legal herbs.

“The added stimulant will make the dance music just as attractive,” he said. “We’ll add gourmet bottle soft drinks as well, but we’re not going to turn Nite Caps into a soda factory.”

But until Tuesday, the Strip clubs will still be fair game for those over 18. Some, like The Keg, are even planning special parties to celebrate the end of an era.

“Hey, it’s the last call for alcohol for a lot of our customers,” Allen said. “Why shouldn’t we throw them a party?”

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