Officials and residents discuss bar closing hours

CONVENT — A proposed ordinance regulating the operating hours of businesses with retail alcoholic beverage permits is attracting considerable attention in St. James Parish.

Several parish residents, including the sheriff, an assistant district attorney and bar owners, appeared during a public hearing held prior to the parish council's regular meeting Wednesday to make public their feelings on the matter.

The ordinance, which would prohibit the sale of all alcoholic beverages in the parish between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m., was recommended to the council by the sheriff's office. The ordinance also would force the closure of all bars and lounges between the hours of 2:30 a.m. and 6 a.m.

Sheriff Gordon Martin said there were a number of OWI arrests in the past two months resulting from a large concentration of state police in the area, especially on the east bank.

Assistant District Attorney Anthony Nobile said a large percentage of traffic and DWI tickets issued in the parish was given after 2 a.m. and that the drivers were more than marginally intoxicated.

Bar owners who spoke during the hearing were against such an ordinance. According to Councilman Whitney Hickerson, most of the bar owners in his area also are opposed to such an ordinance.

Another hearing will be held on the matter prior to the council's April 20 meeting in Vacherie.

Maj. Steve Reed of the St. James Parish Sheriff's Office and Kerwick "Speedy" Detillier of the Gramercy Fire Department were presented distinguished service awards and were made honorary members of the St. James Parish Council.

Reed was recently named outstanding law enforcement officer in the state, while Detillier was named outstanding young fireman in the state by the Louisiana Jaycees.

The council also passed several resolutions pertaining to the parish Department of Human Resources.

One resolution approved a revised contract between the Governor's Office of Elderly Affairs and the parish Department of Human Resources.

Another resolution authorized the department to advertise for bids for elderly services, and a third resolution authorized the filing of an application with the U.S. Department of Transportation for a grant under the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964.

Also adopted was a resolution providing for matching funds of $29,805.50 for the Title XX program, which consists of homemaker and transportation services.