

Police, hotels join forces to deter underage drinking in Waterfront

PATRICK CLOONAN | Tuesday, March 17, 2015, 5:01 a.m.

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Welcome signs into the Waterfront have taken on new meaning for some young people, according to West Homestead officials who said hotel rooms are being obtained for underage drinking parties in which someone manages to block access doors and allow up to 40 people into a room.

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The guest speaker, Lion Dr. Joel Schuman, an ophthalmologist with UPMC, discussed new technologies in eye care.

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West Homestead police said they are trying to help operators of hotels in the Waterfront deal with underage drinking incidents.

Police Chief Christopher Deasy told borough council last week that it begins with someone calling the hotels to make a reservation and then arriving for a rented room.

“They're popping a door open and, before you know it, they have 40 kids in there,” Deasy said.

The chief said he has beefed up patrols around the two hotels in the West Homestead portion of the Waterfront, Courtyard by Marriott and Hampton Inn & Suites, and will meet with the hotels' management.

Both are located along West Waterfront Drive.

The Courtyard by Marriott is one of five Pennsylvania hotels run by Island Hospitality Management of West Palm Beach, Fla.

“We do not condone any illegal activity,” Island Hospitality spokesman Mark Winer said. “If we are made aware of that activity, we would use our best efforts to stop it.”

A person in the office at the Waterfront's Hampton Inn & Suites said she was not at liberty to comment. She said she could not provide a number for the hotel's management company.

On the other end of the Waterfront there's a Holiday Inn Express along East Waterfront Drive in Munhall.

“We have a pretty good working relationship with the hotel in our town,” Munhall police Chief Patrick Campbell said Monday. “They've worked closely with us in the past.”

The general manager could not be reached.

“We've had a few incidents since they opened, but nothing recently,” Campbell said. “We got a tip that it may happen at one of our hotels in the Waterfront (but) there was no report from the weekend.”

Campbell said it is not uncommon for any hotel to have a situation in which an adult rents a room for the night and just turns it over to a kid.

While there is no age limit in Pennsylvania law for booking a hotel room, travel experts point out that contracts signed by minors cannot be enforced and in Pennsylvania the age of majority is 18.

Generally, hotels require the use of a credit card when renting a room. Credit cards usually are not issued to someone under 18, but an adult can add a minor as an authorized user of their card — though the adult remains responsible for the payments.

Citing state driving laws, AAA East Central legislative director Theresa Podjurski said it is illegal for anyone under 21 to consume, possess or transport alcohol.

She said adults can be held liable for contributing to the delinquency of a minor in an underage drinking incident.

“Adults, even parents, who knowingly and intentionally supply minors with alcohol, are subject to a fine of at least \$1,000 for the first offense and \$2,500 for each additional offense and face up to one year in jail,” Podjurski said.

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