

When the party's over...

By TED ATKINSON

"We're not moralistic and we're not on a crusade because we know that wouldn't do any good," says Norman Hart, manager of the University Centre at Queen's University.

Queen's was the focus of several recent articles dealing with alcohol abuse and students.

These articles dealt with the damage done to property at homecoming parties, specifically at the University of Western Ontario (UWO) in London, Queen's in Kingston, and McGill in Montreal. The articles stressed that alcohol abuse was the common denominator.

A four-day program, recently organized by students at Queen's, sought to show that responsible drinking should be the goal of each and every student. Responsible drinking is a revolutionary idea since in the past it's been assumed that to abstain from alcohol completely led to an overall better life. Organizations such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and other advocating temperance, many with religious roots, have emphasized that there is no such thing as a "social drinker."

According to AA, the social drinker is a myth since alcohol consumption of any amount leads to addiction. As consumption increases, tolerance is increased, leading to consumption of larger amounts of alcohol to satisfy an increased tolerance level. AA offers people advice, support and education in an attempt to control their struggle against alcoholism.

A progressive group that supports the idea of controlled drinking is Bacchus (Boost Alcohol Consciousness Concerning the Health of University Students), which originated in the US in 1976. It now has over 150 branches in the US and came to Canada about a decade ago.

At present there are only three active chapters in the Ontario university system; at UWO, Windsor, and Wilfred Laurier.

Vicki Krotz, Bacchus director at WLU, says most universities throughout Ontario have been approached about alcohol awareness, but due to budget restraints, they haven't been able to approach Ontario colleges. Krotz highlighted the point that Bacchus uses "a soft sell approach," and doesn't try to force itself on anyone. Their main function, as outlined in their pamphlets, is to "promote alcohol awareness and education." What's noteworthy about Bacchus is the fact that some of its funding comes from the Association of Canadian Distillers, who also have their own campaign to reduce drinking.

Campaign for Responsible Drinking

In 1984, three separate ad campaigns were introduced, although the focus in each was on drinking and driving rather than general education about alcohol abuse.

In the past year, there has been much public outcry regarding the issue of alcohol and driving, and it is no surprise to see the government involved. In its appeal to the public, the government has used television spots, billboards, bus posters and leaflets. The leaflets are especially eye-catching and effective. For example, one leaflet begins with the caption: "First he killed the bottle...". The picture beneath depicts a corpse and a grieving man sitting at the roadside.

Another approach is a leaflet discussing myths associated with drinking. Some of these quoted were: coffee will sober you up; alcohol is a stimulant; and if you eat before drinking you won't get drunk. It is simple to dispel these myths. The only thing proven to have a sobering effect on people who drink is time. If you've consumed too much alcohol, the only method of sobering up is to let the alcohol be processed and passed out of your system. Secondly, alcohol is scientifically shown to be a depressant in direct contrast to what many believe. Lastly, the idea of eating before you commence drinking is one serious myth that must be dispelled. A false sense of security is established when eating prior to drinking because of the belief that food will prevent you from becoming drunk. Food only slows down the process of the alcohol's entrance into the blood stream. Drinking on a full stomach creates a delayed reaction; driving home later that evening could find you legally impaired.

A parallel campaign was begun by Labatt's and the Canadian Association of Distilleries. It's also hardhitting and forces the viewer to question his responsibility to himself and others. The most dynamic advertisement to date is the billboard that shows a little girl with a caption that reads: "For her." Beneath the picture is the message "If you drink, don't drive." The sign also prominently displays a Labatt's logo.

Many would question Labatt's involvement in an issue such as impaired driving, but logo identification means more than advertising, and more advertising usually means increased consumption. "You drink the advertising," says Terry Vickers, President of Vickers and Brown Co., a national advertising agency. A campaign of this nature enhances Labatt's chances of becoming the premier beer company in sales in Ontario. The company is attempting to attract more consumers, while outwardly it presents the image of a responsible corporate citizen.



The Insurance Bureau of Canada (IBC) has the most striking ad campaign of the three. Even with tougher laws, increased fines, jail sentences, and a general tightening of the thumbscrews across the board a drinking and driving problem still exists. In response to this dilemma, the IBC has directed their new campaign at friends, relatives and co-workers in an attempt to utilize the force of peer pressure. Many believe this attempt will work where previous ideas have failed. People are anticipating that the IBC's stand on impaired driving will lead to a reduction in the number of impaired drivers.

One leaflet the IBC issued was simply entitled "What do you do if...". Upon open the leaflet the reader is confronted with three hypothetical questions about a friend drowning, attempting suicide or getting into his car after drinking too much. The leaflet stresses that you wouldn't let your friend commit suicide or drown, "but in 1981, according to Statistics Canada, more than half of all fatal crashes involved alcohol." The leaflet includes a chart so that the average person can approximate his alcohol level before they drive. It is not a bible on blood concentration levels, but provides some clue as to one's level of alcohol consumption. If after drinking, you can't read the chart, don't drive!

The real focus is to question drinking and driving habits before the party begins. During the Public Forum on Drinking and Driving held in Toronto on Friday, November 23, 1984, some solutions to impaired driving were voiced. A suggestion to reduce blood concentration level to .05 from .08 would help to cut alcohol consumption. John Bates from PRIDE (People Can Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere) had several suggestions: toughening present laws, greater penalties, raising the drinking age to 21, increased spot checks, and portable breathalysers so people have some idea of their own levels. These were some of the ideas aired at the symposium and fully supported by those present. More importantly, changing present attitudes towards drunk driving are a must. Karen Mitchell, founder of MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) states, "Driving while impaired must be seen as abhorrent antisocial behaviour."

Mitchell formed the group following the death of a friend's daughter due to a drunk driver. In a recent article in *Maclean's*, Mitchell illustrated the relationship between drunk driving and the law, using an effective analogy. She argues that more people end up paying a severe fine, and possibly losing their equipment, and sometimes their vehicle when caught fishing out of season. In contrast, she states that it's very rare to hear of someone being severely punished for drunk driving. In fact, the penalties for first offence vary. A fine may be levied from \$120 to \$1,000 with jail terms rarely being imposed.

MADD shares the same philosophy of responsible alcohol use as Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD). In SADD, a student signs an agreement with his parents. The contract stipulates that if a student can't drive because he has been drinking too much, he can phone home, without fear of punishment, and the parents agree to pick him up. The relationship is reciprocal.

The common denominator among the campaigns is the emphasis on the need for people to examine their own habits regarding drinking and driving.

