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Tanner Herget, Owner
tanner@51wharf.com
(207) 774-1151, x9



Carol Swicker, STOP Project Manager
cswicker@mcd.org
(207) 773-7737



Sgt. Andrew Hutchings
andrewh@portlandmaine.gov
(207) 233-1795



Jan Beitzer, Executive Director
jbeitzer@portlandmaine.com
(207) 772-6828

Portland Bars Target Fake IDs

Portland, ME--Kids using fake IDs are going to get caught, just ask bar owners and door staff in Portland's Old Port.

"In the last month, our door staff has confiscated over 30 fake IDs," says Tanner Herget, owner of 51 Wharf Restaurant & Ultra Lounge and chair of Portland's Night Life Oversight Committee, a group organized by Portland Downtown District. "That includes both IDs that were created using personal or internet technology, as well as real, state-issued IDs that don't belong to the person presenting it." Herget flips through a large binder where he retains many of the questionable IDs. "Kids are creative in coming up with fake IDs, but we are working just as hard to train our staff on what to look for."

As college students return home for the holidays and make plans to catch up with their friends, Portland bar owners are working with police to thwart the efforts of would-be underage drinkers. Recently, they have focused their attention on the increased number of fake IDs being presented at their doors.

The majority of IDs confiscated are real; they just don't belong to the person using them. The technology used to create fake IDs keeps changing. However, the training that sellers and servers of alcohol receive, as well as the number of experienced door staff in the Old Port, is no match for these false identifications. Wharf Street is just one example of the dozens of fake IDs confiscated.

Herget describes the efforts of 51 Wharf to address the use of fake IDs. "When we spot a fake ID, we take it and immediately contact the police patrolling the area. We also have access to a texting tree that allows us to instantly alert door staff at twenty other Old Port establishments with a description of not just the person possessing the ID, but everyone else in their party. That can quickly put an end to the evening of bar hopping. Given the likelihood that your fake ID is going to be spotted and taken, it's just not worth the risk."

Portland Police take this issue seriously. Sgt. Andrew Hutchings says, "Any fake IDs that we get in the Old Port are confiscated and if the person using it is located, quite often it results in a summons or possibly an arrest, as well as a fine of \$200. We also sometimes deliver the IDs we've confiscated to the address on the ID, during normal patrols. Our primary goal is to ensure the public's safety. Underage drinking creates risk for everyone."

Last year, Portland passed a local ordinance that gives consideration to the number of employees who have completed a responsible beverage service training when reviewing liquor license renewal applications. The ordinance has led to an increased demand for trainings, such as those offered by Frank Lyons, a 23-year veteran of the Liquor Enforcement Bureau. Lyons devotes a significant portion of the training to teaching sellers and servers of alcohol what to look for when examining an ID. Some of the features on legitimate IDs are not visible to the naked eye, and can only be seen with a magnifying glass. Scanners also aid in the detection of fake IDs, as well as a guide that includes pictures and descriptions of valid IDs for every state, tools that many bars provide to their door staff.

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