

EXPAND ALCOHOL SERVER TRAINING

Written by Elizabeth Trendowski

Connecticut's Dram Shop Act says that any establishment that sells an alcoholic beverage to an intoxicated person is legally responsible if the drunk then injures someone else or destroys their property.

Most restaurants and bars don't train their staff to detect when a patron is getting drunk. Public safety would be better served if Connecticut either made server training mandatory or created incentives that would motivate bars and restaurants to train personnel. Perhaps some liquor permittees still feel that it's the drunk's fault entirely for getting drunk.

Training programs, such as those offered by Servers and Managers Alcohol Responsibility Training (SMART), teach bartenders and waiters to notice early when a customer is becoming intoxicated and to handle such situations in ways that won't offend the customer or other patrons.

Efforts to have the general assembly enact mandatory training have failed so far. Restaurants and bar keeps say high turnover, coupled with the several hundred dollars it costs to train employees, would make mandatory training prohibitively expensive.

That's fine. How does \$ 250,00.00 sound to you then? Perhaps you served a minor. Un-oh. Those damages are unlimited. It's the high turnover of help you say? I say that's a fact. Unfortunately, it doesn't matter. They work for you. You and they are liable for damages.

It's not funny. Everyone has a car and there is virtually no mass transportation. The designated driver program seems to have designated itself invisible. The hospitality industry is an industry priding itself on caring for one another. If you work in this industry and don't care how much you serve your patrons because they tip well, then please leave. Get out of the industry and don't come back.

The only training law in Connecticut was passed in 2006. It gives the state's liquor control commissioner the discretion to impose training on liquor permit holders as a penalty for violating the liquor control act. Common sense tells us that if permit holders have the training in advance, they might not violate the law.

The risk involved in failing to train has been underscored many times over with restaurants, bars, country clubs; package stores losing judgments of 250,000 or more. And here's the other part of that equation. You feel like a loser. Why? You will feel like a loser because a patron from your establishment left and hurt someone else because no one took the time to notice he was slurring his words. No one took the time to ask questions to determine where the patron was prior to sitting at your bar. No one did that because that task wasn't expected of him or her.

Twenty-two states and Washington, DC already mandate some form of server training. Other states sponsor programs in which those restaurant and bar owners who arrange to train their employees receive reduced penalties for liquor law violations and reduced liability in civil court proceedings.

Associations in the Connecticut hospitality industry have recommended that, to minimize the expense, drinking and eating establishments be required to train one person, and that person can train the rest of the staff. That's a step in the right direction. As of now, the decision to train (or not) is left entirely to the goodwill of the business owner.

Elizabeth Trendowski was the founder and past president of SMART Programs (Servers & Managers Alcohol Responsibility Training). She is currently an adjunct professor at the University of New Haven in the hospitality department, national speaker on liquor liability and dram shop issues and works for Robson Forensic as a liquor liability / dram shop expert. She may be reached at 800.813.6736 or ElizabethA.Trendowski@robsonforensic.com.