

Legislation

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Kingstown, was charged with driving under the influence. The other two guards, a 17-year-old male and a 17-year-old female could not be charged because Rhode Island does not have a law against underage consumption. "Every time we pass legislation, we find a loophole," Long said.

In response to the Mackerel Cove incident, a forum on teen drinking was held July 30 at the teen center.

Five days later, a rollover accident involving underage drinking occurred on Tashtassuc Road, Long said. Jason Kerbel, 18, of North Kingstown, was charged with driving under the influence. His passenger, an unidentified female juvenile, was not charged in the incident. "With all of the publicity this issue is receiving, we are still seeing these incidents," Long said. He referred to underage drinking as an "epidemic" across the state.

Jamestown police reports from last Monday and Tuesday seem to confirm Long's assessment. In addition to the Tashtassuc accident, two other accidents occurred on those days involving underage drivers.

According to police reports, an 18-year-old from North Kingstown, was charged with driving under the influence last Tuesday after he drove his car over a rock in Beavertail State Park and was unable to dislodge it. A witness who reported numerous cans of alcohol on the ground and a car stuck on the rocks called police to the scene. Merrit had three underage passengers in his car at the time, Police said.

An accident also occurred last

Monday on America Way. Jamestown Police Officer Mark Esposito was on patrol when he discovered an unoccupied vehicle on the north side of the road that had struck a tree. Shortly after he arrived on the scene, a woman drove up. According to the police report she initially stated that she was driving, but after a short conversation with Officer Esposito, admitted that her 18-year-old son was the driver.

Officer Esposito spoke with the son, who acknowledged driving the vehicle. He told police that he fell asleep at the wheel. Police reports indicate that Officer Esposito smelled alcohol on the man's breath, but some time had passed since the accident and there were no witnesses so no arrests were made.

Police Chief Thomas P. Tighe said police are frustrated. "We want to help them. We'd like to be able to support the parents and extend them the help they need," he said.

According to Long, 32 states have underage consumption laws, but Rhode Island isn't one of them. This legislation will make it a crime for an underage person to be under the influence of alcohol, he said.

Warwick Police Chief and Chairman of the Police Chiefs Association, Colonel Steven M. McCartney concurred with Long. "We are here to support this legislation," he said. "When young people are given responsibility and they let us down, there needs to be a level of concern and some parameters for accountability," McCartney said.

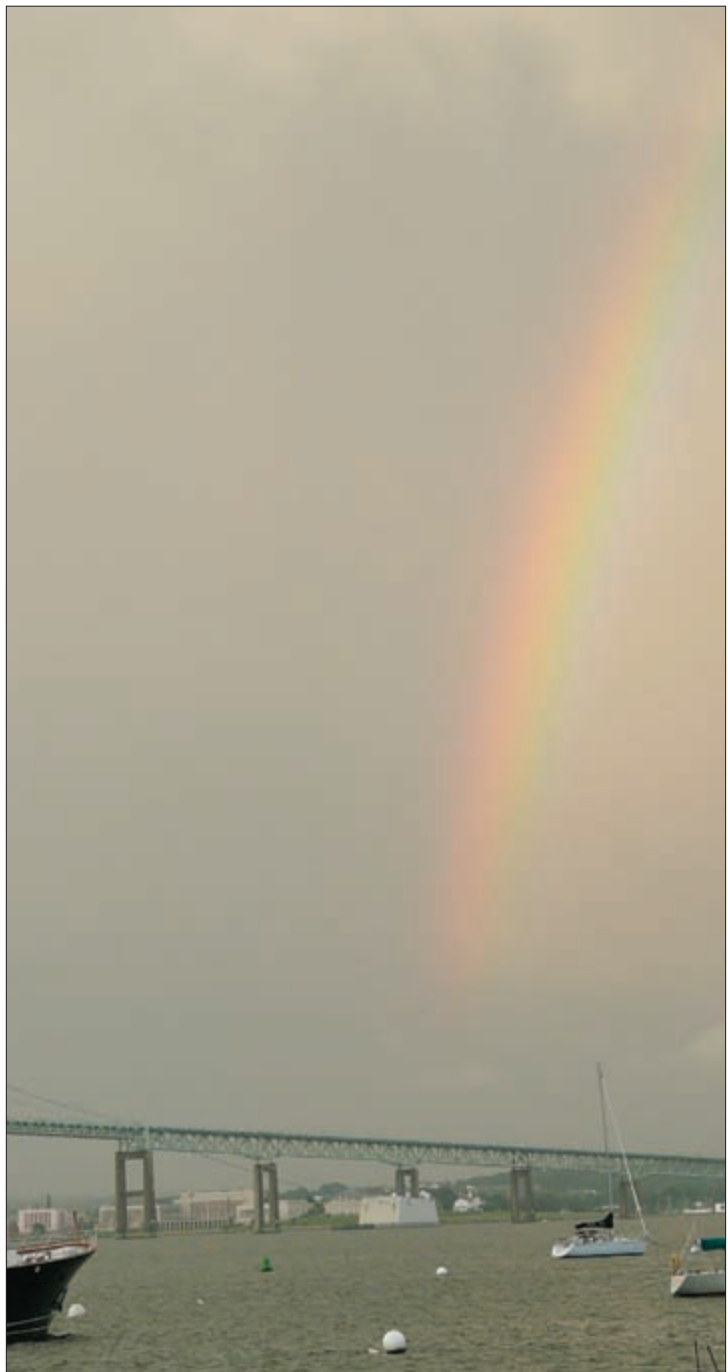
Administrator Janis Loiselle from the Office of Highway Safety expressed her concern. "Youth, parents, the community, educators, legislators, law enforcement, we all need to communicate the mes-

sage that underage drinking is not a rite of passage," she said. Young people are not as invincible as they might think they are, Loiselle said. "It can happen and it will happen to someone," she said, referring to serious and/or fatal accidents.

Hosley, coordinator of the Jamestown Substance Abuse Prevention Task Force, has been active in substance abuse prevention for fifteen years. She drove by the scene of the Tashtassuc accident on the way to the press conference. "As I drove by, I thought to myself, I'm glad there is no white cross there," Hosley said.

She emphasized the need to build on the community's strengths. "We have a lot of strengths here in Jamestown," Hosley said. "We work together: the task force, the teen center, the police department and the legislators are all working on this issue, but we also need to close up the loopholes. It's important not to create an us vs. them mentality when it comes to underage drinking," Hosley said.

Technology has not been an asset to the underage drinking issue, according to Hosley. "Text messaging, cell phones and social networking sites have all contributed to an atmosphere that can be used to promote underage drinking," she said. Hosley stressed the importance of approaching the issue from multiple levels. "Project Northland is an excellent intervention program being used in grades 6 to 8 as part of the health curriculum. There are forums on Internet safety available, and we are seeing new legislation being introduced and, of course, press coverage always helps," she said. "Young people need boundaries and clear expectations," Hosley said, because in the final analysis, "Kids would rather be safe."



Stormy day

Monday's stormy skies yielded a perfect backdrop for this rainbow over the Newport Bridge.

Photo by Vic Richardson

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Floating florals theme of September contest

A new event, the Flower Flotilla, will be part of this year's Wickford Harbor Fest to be held Sept. 20 and 21.

The flotilla is a contest open to individuals and groups – especially state garden clubs – to determine the best floating floral arrangement. The design is limited by the entrant's imagination. The size is limited by the kit that will be provided courtesy of Mulzer's Car Care and Wickford Lumber.

There will be prizes, but the best prize will be bragging rights until next year's Wickford Flower Flotilla.

A contest official will be available to receive entries at the bridge on Brown Street in Wickford between 3 and 6 p.m. on Thursday, Sept. 18, and again between 1 and 5 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 19.

Kits and entry forms are available at the North Kingstown Chamber of Commerce Charitable Foundation, co-located with the chamber at 8045 Post Rd., North Kingstown. Each kit will contain a 15-inch tire inner tube, 20 feet of standard clothes line, and a 2- by 2-foot plywood board to mount the floral creation. Groups or individuals may submit more than one entry. An entry fee of \$25 will be charged per kit.

For more information, please contact Flower Flotilla Co-Chairman Hal Morpeth at 294-9367, or the Charitable Foundation at 295-5566.