

Fake IDs a federal offense

By Steve Noble
Staff Reporter

It was Saturday night and Deb wanted to go to a bar with her friends. She was underage, but that didn't matter. She just borrowed her friend's driver's license and made the trip from Schramm Hall to a bar downtown.

When she arrived, the doorman asked to see an identification card. She handed the license to him. He looked at the picture, then at her. "Could you sign your name, please?" he asked. Deb signed the name of the woman on the ID.

"This isn't your driver's license," the doorman said, after comparing signatures. "Wait here," he said, as he pointed to a corner of the bar and left

to call the police.

That evening, Deb was cited. One month later, she was fined \$68 in court.

Deb is not alone. College students, police officers and bar managers confirm that with a recently changed drinking age and the constant lure of nightlife and alcohol, many minors are willing to risk being caught using false identification.

Statistics on the use of fake and altered ID cards are hard to find, since many bars just refuse admission if people may be under age. Often the ID is confiscated and the minor simply leaves the establishment.

Kirk Welsh, manager of PO Pears, said his bar confiscates about four IDs on busy nights.

The Lancaster County Attorney's

Office files 25 to 30 cases a year. But Detective Myron Carkoski of the Lincoln Police Department said the department doesn't keep statistics "because we know it's out there and will always be there."

Minors find many ways to get into bars. The most common method is to borrow an ID from a friend who has some physical resemblance. Also, IDs are changed by putting liquid paper or fingernail polish over the letters and typing or writing over them.

A "peel-back" system often is used. The plastic covering on the license is peeled back and small drafting letters are put over the actual date. Then the ID is relaminated. Birth certificates also are used to get ID cards. They are changed or borrowed to establish a new identity with a different age.

Although many minors are successful in these attempts, personnel in the Drivers License Issuing Office and the police warn that using someone else's birth certificate is a federal offense. Minors who use false ID cards are subject to a \$500 fine or three months in jail.

Bars often play a part in enforcement, according to Kirk Benson, manager of Barrymore's.

"Since we don't have anyone carding at the door, we have a lot more minors come in," Benson said. "But we pay the waitresses \$2 every time someone is unable to prove they are of age."

Welsh said PO Pears pays its doormen \$10 for each fake ID card they confiscate. The doormen often compete to see who can catch the most illegal IDs in one night, he said.

But most bar owners find good reason for the constant screening for minors. Carolyn Hatfield, supervisor of the Liquor Control Enforcement Division, said the use of fake IDs probably is the most common violation. When a minor is discovered drinking, the bar is closed for 10 days or fined \$50 a day for the first offense. With a previous suspension, the fine is \$100 a day.

Officials see no sign of a drastic increase brought on by a rise in the drinking age. Nor is there any sign of a crackdown or a reduction in the numbers of underage drinkers.

"The reason that it happens a lot is because there are a lot more minors out there than police officers," Carkoski said.

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