



**“The birthday thing is ridiculous at this point. No one should drink 21 shots. That is death. But people do it every night of the week.”**

**—Reg McMeen  
owner, Duffy's Tavern**

# Bar owners attest to binge drinking problem

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McMeen said Lincoln bars have been cooperative in trying to reduce binge drinking by eliminating 25 cent wells and free birthday drinks.

“We’ve been put under an enormous amount of pressure not to make any mistakes,” McMeen said. “The clientele also feel pressure, and as a result they go out and (drink) more.”

**The crawl**

Mausbach said The Brass Rail doesn’t allow anyone in who employees suspect is on a bar crawl.

“If we see it’s someone’s birthday and we are their last stop, we don’t let them in because we know they have already had too much to drink,” he said. “If someone is drunk, they can’t drink anyway, so they don’t help us because we can’t sell to them.”

Wright said the main reason he went on a bar crawl was because his friends wanted it.

“It was traditional,” Wright said. “I drank the whole night, and I did OK for the whole night except for the last half-hour, which I don’t remember.”

“I didn’t want to go all that bad,” he said. “The friends I have who are 21 had theirs, and they want to get people back, so they take them out.”

McMeen said Duffy’s has its own policy concerning bar crawls: If any of the members of a birthday group have the normal signs of

intoxication, they don’t get in. “The birthday thing is ridiculous at this point,” McMeen said. “No one should drink 21 shots. That is death. But people do it every night of the week.”

“If you really want to piss someone off,” he said, “tell them they can’t do something on their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.”

Duffy’s doesn’t have a hard-and-fast rule concerning bar crawls, he added, but if people are being responsible and behaving themselves, usually there are no problems. Tradition seems to be the main reason students go on bar crawls.

“It’s tradition on the 21<sup>st</sup>,” said Mike Ediger, a junior architecture major. “We like to drink.”

Ediger and about eight other people were on a bar crawl Friday night.

In celebration, the group bought two Fishbowls – the well-known extra-large mixed drinks that are a house specialty at Duffy’s. The group then raced to see which foursome could gulp the jumbo, straw-laden Jack and Cokes down fastest.

Most of the group members said they went on their own bar crawls when they turned 21 and they attend the bars regularly – on average about four to five times a week.

“We’re way past our limits,” one of the men exclaimed with a smile after finishing the Fishbowl race.

**The changing scene**

Brass Rail owner Mausbach said that com-

pared to when he was in college – from 1983 to 1986 – the level of student drinking seems to be about the same.

Wright said he wasn’t sure if binge drinking – or drinking as a whole – had changed all that much since his parents were in college. But the culture surrounding alcohol had changed over the years, he said.

“I think for one thing people start (drinking) younger. Most kids start in high school – I did,” he said. “Kids are more irresponsible and they drink more (at one sitting) than they used to.”

Duke Engel, director of the Independence Center, the alcohol and drug treatment center at BryanLGH Medical Center West, said that when looking at the problem of binge drinking, it’s not possible to get a comprehensive idea of the problems it causes until one looks at the complete picture.

“As a culture, we have started to understand problems with alcohol and problems with excessive drinking,” Engel said. “Colleges were just one of the last places where we really saw the problems that drinking causes.”

“I don’t think the problem is worse,” he said. “I just think understanding and insight is getting better.”

Duffy’s owner McMeen said there is a “huge” binge drinking problem at UNL, but also that it was nothing new, and that there was a binge drinking scene when he was in college from 1980 to 1985.

“This problem has been here forever,” he said. “I used to jokingly say that most college towns have a night life, but in Lincoln, we have

beer.”

**Graduation**

Wright said he thought the culture of drinking in college is definitely one that disappears once students graduate from campus life.

“I think it slows down. It will for me,” he said. “I don’t plan on going to work and coming home and getting piss-drunk.”

“I think college is the one time when you have responsibility – like you can drive a car and you can drink – but at the same time you don’t have a real job or a family. You have the power to make your own choices.”

Engel said many people reminisce after college about the days of being “crazy drunks,” but that also isn’t looking at the big picture.

“When we were in college it was no big deal,” he said. “But what you have to face is that we are all going to end up burying someone from this. We don’t talk about that during the reminiscing.”

“There are the ones who outgrow the partying, but what about the ones who didn’t out-grow it?”

**Rehabilitation**

Wright said he thought curbing binge drinking was something that had to start in the home and with the family.

“I think a lot of the laws are pretty asinine,” he said. “It comes down to the parents being responsible. My mom educated me. Kids have to be taught.”

While not trying to discount the problem,

Engel said it was important to realize there is a large percentage of students who drink in a reasonable fashion, or don’t drink at all.

Engel said he doesn’t think any college student ever uses the term “binge drinking.”

The misconception that “everybody is doing it” when it comes to binge drinking is definitely not the case, he said.

“The majority of college students don’t drink this way,” he said. “You would think, from the stories you hear, that 90 percent of students get drunk every weekend.”

“Everyone wants to say it’s the majority,” Engel continued. “I think we have to look at the fact that there are an awful lot (of students) that don’t do this, and the ones that are drinking excessively aren’t just part of the crowd.”

McMeen said he thinks the heart of the problem definitely lies with the patrons rather than the bar owners, such as himself.

“(Bar owners) are feeling undeserved pressure,” he said. “(People) still see the problem as the distributors (of the alcohol) not the patrons.”

“I don’t even see how they can do anything about it,” he said. “Our back is up against the wall, and we will go out of business if we have to do anything else.”

“It’s not my responsibility to make sure you don’t drink too much.”

McMeen said binge drinking is getting attention because there are many people who indulge without thinking of the consequences.

“It is killing people,” he said. “Binge drinking is dumb, dangerous and it leads to alcoholism.”