

Police use undercover officers to fight party-related crimes

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Spreading the word
And people were definitely out there Friday night. The North Bottoms area, where many UNL students rent apartments and houses, was crowded with partygoers.

Jackson said police are alerted to parties by calls from citizens and by scouting out hard-partying neighborhoods like the North Bottoms early in the evening.

For veteran officers like Jackson and Jeff Urkevich, the signs of a growing party are obvious. Normally empty streets are packed with parked cars, and lawns are littered with beer cans or plastic cups.

But the most obvious sign of a party on its way to losing control is its size, Jackson said.

Jackson said parties are a "gateway" to other offenses. Out-of-control parties, Jackson said, can often result in assaults, theft and a host of other crimes.

These crimes are more likely to occur when people unknown to the hosts attend the party, Jackson said.

"You get these groups of individuals who create havoc and then walk away laughing as the resident gets a ticket for creating a disturbance," Jackson said.

"The only way to combat that is for residents to say (to unknown guests) 'hey, this is a private party.'"

To reinforce the danger unknown guests represent to large parties, undercover police officers are often sent into parties.

Undercover

Once inside a party, undercover officers try to buy alcohol from the party hosts, confirming the house is selling alcohol without a liquor license.

The officers ascertain who collects the money and where it is held. The officers also seek out other offenses, such as individuals urinating in public and smoking marijuana.

Undercover officers who enter parties are supported by uniformed officers outside. After the undercover officers have gathered enough evidence to issue citations, uniformed officers are called in, and the party is busted.

Various officers are asked to perform undercover work. Officer M. McGuire, who worked undercover Friday, said being female helped her pass as a genuine partygoer.

"Most people don't think of a woman when they think of a police officer. They think of an older man," McGuire said.

Undercover police officers are under no obligation to announce their presence even if confronted by other parties, Urkevich said.

Undercover officers entered eight parties. The officers were unable to purchase beer at any of the parties and said they were either not charged or the party's keg was dead.

"We aren't here to make sure you don't have a fun school year."

JEFF URKEVICH
Lincoln police officer

To cite someone for selling liquor without a license, police must purchase alcohol at the parties.

Undercover officers entered one party but left shortly after because the party's keg was empty.

But later, Urkevich responded to a complaint made by a neighbor and knocked on the home's front and garage doors several times. While Urkevich was trying to get someone to open the door, the party's host, fifth-year history major Marty Toalson, arrived after returning a keg.

After agreeing to end the party, Toalson opened the garage door to his home, releasing a cloud of cigarette smoke and about 60 people. Half-empty cups of beer littered the garage.

At its height, Toalson estimated the party's size at between 150 and 200 people and said he knew about half of his guests. When Urkevich arrived, the party was halfway through its third keg.

Toalson said he had held parties many times before and had dealt with police. He said he remembered Urkevich from parties in previous years.

"A lot of times when you're dealing with officers, they'll give you the benefit of the doubt," Toalson said.

Toalson added the evening had been a profitable one.

A dorm without RAs

Police also paid close attention to the Claremont Apartments, 1341 N. Ninth St., where many UNL students live. Several small parties were under way in the complex Friday night although none became out of control.

Senior business administration major Dan Niles was at a party contacted by Urkevich.

"People are toning it down a bit," Niles said. "LPD usually shows up to any decent party. They gotta do what they gotta do. For the most part, they just want to make sure everyone is safe."

Earlier in the evening, Niles said he had, on a bet, run naked through the apartment building's lawn.

"It's the start of the school year," Niles said. "A guy's gotta do it. And \$45 is a lot of money."

Relations between officers and partygoers were positive throughout the night.

"That's the thing. A lot of people party in Lincoln. You just aren't a jerk about it," Urkevich said. "We don't want to just barge into your house. We aren't here to make sure you don't have a fun school year."

If the hosts of a party do not cooperate with police once contacted, citations

are often given.

Party-related citations can be misdemeanors such as maintaining a disorderly house, minor in possession of alcohol, urinating in public, selling liquor without a license or procuring alcohol for minors.

Particularly uncooperative parties can be dealt with harshly.

"People think you can't go to jail for this," Urkevich said. "It's a misdemeanor just like any misdemeanor, and a misdemeanor can be a jailable offense."

"We try to make it as punitive as possible just so some sort of lesson can be learned," Jackson said.

Legal punishment, however, represents only one hazard parties face. A UNL student was taken from campus to BryanLGH West on Friday night for alcohol-poisoning treatment after a suspected night of drinking.

University Police responded to a call in a residence hall room in Selleck Quadrangle at 1:23 a.m. where University Police Sgt. Mylo Bushing said a male student was found passed out on his room's floor.

Bushing said officers on the scene found the student had vomited on himself, the floor and his bed. Bushing said the student had cut his forearm and bruised his left cheek. The student told officers he suffered the injuries in a fall.

After the student faded in and out of consciousness, Bushing said the student was taken to the hospital.

Then and now

Police hope this focused enforcement will diminish party complaints again this year.

Casady said undercover officers working Friday night overheard many students expressing concern over the increased police presence at parties.

"I think (the increased police presence) will cause people to be less likely to break the law when they have a party," Casady said.

Casady said university students were only part of Lincoln's party problem.

Statistics from last year's party detail revealed a large number of parties contacted by police were held by high school students and adults unrelated to the university.

This fact was surprising to some officers on the party detail.

"If you had asked me (if non-university partygoers required more police attention than UNL students) last year, before we started doing the details, I would've said no," Jackson said.

Analysts predict interest-rate hike

■ They say question is now whether another rise will follow in the fall.

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan's pledge to move "promptly and forcefully" to counter inflationary threats has analysts convinced the central bank will boost interest rates today for the second time in eight weeks.

But the real question may be what happens after that. Will Fed policymakers see enough signs of a slowdown in economic growth that they won't feel the need to boost rates even higher in the fall?

Wall Street on Monday was clearly taking the view that today's rate hike will be all the Fed needs to contain the inflation threat. Investors pushed stock prices into record territory, up by more than 100 points in afternoon trading.

But private analysts cautioned that this market euphoria may be overdone. They noted that while the economy has slowed in recent months, it is still expected to grow almost 4 percent this year, a robust rate that has pushed unemployment down to its lowest level in three decades and left the Fed worrying about rising wage pressures.

"The Fed is fearful that the economy is expanding too strongly, that labor markets are too tight and that inflationary pressures will develop if things don't slow down," said economist Mark Zandi at Regional Financial Associates in West Chester, Pa.

Zandi said he believed the Fed would raise rates not only this week, but again at its next meeting Oct. 5. And he predicted the central bank would likely hint at future moves in its rate announcement in part to toss cold water on an overly optimistic stock market.

"I think these stock market highs are of concern to the Fed," Zandi said. Much of the strong consumer spending driving the economy, he said, is coming because consumers feel wealthy thanks to investment gains.

Part of the market's confusion over Fed intentions may stem from botched signals by the central bank, some analysts believe.

On June 30, the Fed boosted its target for the federal funds rate, the interest banks charge on overnight loans,

by a quarter-point to 5 percent, the first increase in two years.

While the markets had widely expected that rate hike, the Fed announced at the same time that it was moving its policy directive, which foreshadows future moves, back to neutral.

Markets, which had feared the June 30 rate hike would be just the first in a series, rallied on the Fed's announcement of the neutral policy directive. That boosted stock prices back up and pushed down long-term interest rates, which are market-set.

"I think the Fed completely misread the potential market response to a shift back to a neutral bias," said David Jones, economist at Aubrey G. Lanston & Co. in New York.

Delivering his midyear report on the economy to Congress on July 22, Greenspan said the Fed was still prepared to move "promptly and forcefully" to counter inflation, remarks taken as strongly signaling a rate hike at their August meeting.

In all of this maneuvering, the Fed is walking a delicate line. Greenspan has been worrying since December 1996 about "irrational exuberance" pushing stock prices too high. At that time, the Dow was hovering around 6,500, and it's gone up by 70 percent since then.

But while Greenspan and other Fed policy-makers are clearly nervous that stock prices are inflated and could suddenly come crashing to earth, they don't want to be blamed for causing that by pushing interest rates higher than necessary to deal with the problem the Fed is supposed to worry about — inflation.

"The Fed doesn't want to cause a recession, they just want to make sure that inflation doesn't get out of hand," said David Wyss, economist at Standard & Poor's DRI.

Many see the Fed's goal this year as taking away the stimulus it provided last fall when it cut interest rates three times to counter a growing threat that the Asian crisis could topple the United States into a recession.

Fed critics contend the world is still in too fragile a state to embark on a series of rate hikes, especially with American manufacturers and farmers struggling to cope with lost export markets.

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