

Restaurant association focuses on goals

Group wants to maintain the safety, economic vitality and hometown image of West Chester Borough

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WEST CHESTER — All success comes at a price.

For the restaurants of West Chester's downtown area, that price is finding ways to prevent their customers from destroying the safety and charm that contributes

to the borough's attractiveness as a dining destination.

Dave Magrogan, owner of Kildare's Irish pub, presented the recently created West Chester Restaurant Association's goals and mission statement at a recent borough council meeting.

Magrogan described the restaurant association as dedicated to maintaining the safety, economic vitality and hometown image that make the borough an ideal place to do business.

"All the issues we're dealing with as residents, business owners and community leaders is because West Chester is doing so well," said Magrogan. "The mission of creating the restaurant association was to

promote (the town) as a dining destination."

Some of the ways this can be accomplished, according to Magrogan, is by creating a level playing field among restaurants, especially those with liquor licenses, so that competitive liquor specials don't create problems related to public drunkenness.

According to Magrogan, about 15 restaurants in the downtown area have already signed the restaurant association agreement, which includes a pledge to accept responsibility for making the borough a better, cleaner, safer and more dynamic shopping and dining destination.

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Staff photo by Larry McDermott
People sit at the outside tables at Kildare's Irish pub on Gay Street in West Chester.

Goals

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Specific pledge points focus on ways to reduce and control issues related to alcohol consumption at the various establishments, including preventing illegal drink specials, and offering no specials after midnight. Instead, association members are encouraged to participate in "Three Dollar Thursdays," to eliminate the current \$1 and \$2 specials which have made it easier for college students in particular to consume more alcohol quickly at low cost.

"Thursdays are when the kids are coming out. If we can keep students from going to the bar with \$10 to buy five drinks, that will help," said Magrogan.

Other issues include training the entire staff, not just bartenders, on prohibitions on overpouring drinks and serving intoxicated individuals. In addition, restaurant owners and managers are encouraged to report and share information about customers who could negatively impact the borough, whether through disruptive behavior, or excessive drinking.

Magrogan also claimed the association was interested in

working with the borough on a recommendation from the borough's ad hoc committee on liquor control issues, which would lead to increased personnel for street patrols to help prevent late-night noise and loitering.

"We want this to be a great town, a dynamic town," said Magrogan. "We have to try and find a way to work together on this."

While council members applauded the restaurant association's efforts, Mayor Dick Yoder cautioned Magrogan that there was still more to be done, most notably finding funds to back some of the additional programs, such as the neighborhood patrols.

"The challenge I throw to you and the college is to lock arms with the borough to figure out some way the people who create the problem can be responsible for paying for it,"

said Yoder, who added he was reluctant to throw the burden onto taxpayers.

Magrogan agreed, claiming he didn't expect residents to contribute more than they already have through increased property values associated with the burgeoning restaurant business.

Some residents felt the association's pledge wasn't enough, however.

Diane LeBold, a member of the ad hoc committee on borough liquor issues, claimed restaurant owners weren't doing enough to prevent overpouring and serving drinks to intoxicated customers.

"As a result of overpouring we have lots of public services that are required. We need more money from the public service point of view to deal

with cleaning up and we have no way of getting it," said LeBold.

"Overpouring to get drunk is a serious problem. This is a nice talk but we need some action."

Magrogan attempted to address LeBold's concerns by reiterating ways restaurant owners have attempted to control the issue, both through training and firing workers who knowingly overpour.

However, he added, other factors contribute to the problem that are out of restaurant owners' hands, including house parties, and patterns of drinking heavily immediately prior to going to a bar or restaurant, which delays the visible signs of intoxication.