

An Open Letter on Marketing the East Side as a Destination for Destructive Drinking

June 14, 2011

Rev. March 16, 2012

The undersigned organizations have joined together to call attention to a trend that is damaging our neighborhoods, our main streets, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and especially the younger members of our community.

While going to bars and drinking alcoholic beverages continues to be a matter of personal choice and responsibility on the East Side of Milwaukee, the trend of marketing the East Side as a destination for destructive drinking has become a matter of community concern. Therefore, we have written this position paper, which discourages future programs that create the type of behavior that adversely impacts the quality of life of our community.

The following incidents have led to our concern:

1. The "Teach me how to stumble" marketing campaign that resulted in groups of drunks stumbling around the East Side at all hours of the day and night on Saturday, March 12, 2011. The scene was pretty much repeated the night of Thursday March 17, 2011. The stumbling drunks were wearing green t-shirts stating, "Teach me how to stumble." The following bars participated in the event:

BBC, Cans, Decibel, Dogs Bollocks, East Sider, Hooligans, Judges Irish Pub, La Piazza, Landmark Lanes, Rascals, RC's, Replay Sports Bar, Vintage, Vituccis, Von Trier, Y Not III, Yield

The campaign's website says, "The only place to do a St. Patty's Day Pub Crawl is North Avenue." More information is available at <http://www.northavenuestumble.com/index.html>.

2. Businesses with alcohol licenses turning themselves into bars and liquor stores. The most recent example of this is the Open Pantry on North Ave. installing a sign advertising itself as a "brewhouse" and installing a walk-in beer cooler. Dog's Bollocks and Replay are examples of restaurants with bars dropping or de-emphasizing food service in favor of running a tavern.

3. Promoting hard liquor. Signs on the front of RC's advertise fruit flavored vodka bombs for \$2. The East Side [Business] Association features vodka at its street festivals. A bloody mary tasting event is part of its Tomato Romp. The event is sponsored by Absolut vodka. The Stumble is sponsored by Jameson whiskey.

4. Drinking related deaths. On April 2, 2011, Patrick A. Martin, 23 years old, stumbled down the basement stairs at a friend's house and died. He had a blood-alcohol level of 0.26. Last October 13, 2010, Ryan Fieck stumbled down a retaining wall onto the bike path. His blood-alcohol level was 0.24 – three times the legal limit for driving. According to the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel the medical examiner's report stated that Mr. Fieck had been out with friends at a pub crawl. These deaths followed others in 2009.

5. Destructive drinking is also in evidence at countless house parties and illegally run house taverns throughout the East Side.

The first step in addressing this concern is for the community to recognize that there is a problem. The fact that sober business-owners in the light of day could sign up for an event called "the Stumble" says more about us as a community that it does about any of the participants.

We have complained in the past about behavior related to alcohol, and efforts to address those behaviors need to continue. This open letter, however, addresses the root cause. We stand opposed to the growing culture of alcohol on the East Side, which encourages individuals to engage in destructive drinking. We are not saying that we are opposed to people having fun, or selling, buying, and consuming alcohol in a responsible manner. However, just like there is a point at which a person needs to say, "I've had enough," we, as leaders of neighborhood associations and the East Side community are saying, "We've had enough."

We've had enough of the practices listed above and the damaging effects on our neighborhoods and community members, especially those who are young and here for an education, not to learn how to stumble.

We seek that all individuals in a position of responsibility, governmental bodies, associations, police, UW-M, and especially owners of bars and liquor stores, re-examine their practices in light of this concern and work cooperatively to reduce destructive drinking and promote behavior that is more healthful for individuals and the community.

Sincerely,

Greenwich Village Association
Murray Hill Neighborhood Association
Eastside Milwaukee Community Council
Riverside Park Neighborhood Association
Historic Water Tower Neighborhood
Cambridge Woods Neighborhood Association

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