

Liquor woes plague Ska fest

Officials shut down
Market Square early
due to overcrowding,
'over-service'

Times Colonist staff

Liquor sales are causing problems for the eighth annual Ska Festival.

They were cancelled Thursday at 10 p.m. at the event which features a varied lineup of bands at three locations. Cindy Stephenson, spokeswoman for the provincial liquor licensing branch, said yesterday "a police officer and liquor inspector were [at Market Square on Thursday] and had concerns about over-service and overcrowding."

Under the permit, there were still three hours of liquor service remaining when sales were cancelled.

Ska festival organizers were asked to make changes for last night's and tonight's events.

"They have to have more security staff and to place limits on the amount of liquor they can serve to patrons," said Stephenson.

Liquor inspectors have authority to cancel an event's liquor licence outright, said Stephenson, although that wasn't done in this case.

"I think we're trying to work with the organizers. Our concern is public safety and we want to ensure those issues are being addressed. That's our No. 1 priority."

The event began Wednesday and ends with a free concert this afternoon at Market Square and a second event at the Victoria Curling Club this evening. The festival was expected to attract between 7,000 and 10,000 spectators to the two venues and the Ukrainian Cultural Centre over the four days.

Organizer Heather Furneaux said there can't be any problems "like people smoking marijuana or someone hopping the fence or being overserved," meaning selling liquor to intoxicated patrons. "We're dealing with many different issues and many are not that big. They've just been blown out of proportion, in my eyes."

She says an overzealous liquor inspector has been at the festival when it opened Wednesday and also on Thursday.

The inspector, she says, had conflicts with organizers and patrons.

"They have these problems at any festival, bar or special event," said Furneaux. "They're not huge problems. They just need to be dealt with right away."

Liquor sales at the festival's venues allow for bands to be paid and for organizers to break even, Furneaux said.

"The only means of revenue are ticket sales and beverage gardens and that has to pay for everything: The bands, the organization, the hosting and they rely on so many volunteers to recover all the extra costs," said Gary Lindsay, a sales rep with Lighthouse Brewery.

Furneaux decided to cancel plans to sell alcohol at a "punk party" at the Ukrainian Hall last night "because there will be a lot of younger kids there and I don't even want to deal with it. I'd rather save the curling club and [today's] free afternoon show at the square than jeopardize it for a 200-person venue."

Furneaux said she has never had a problem with liquor inspectors at previous festivals.

DRAMATIC RESCUE AT SOOKE POTHOLES



Alyssa Albany was trapped for more than three hours in a narrow waterfall, seen at the bottom of this photo.

John McKay/Times Colonist



Matt Barney of Sooke Fire Department, left, and Bill Meikle of Juan de Fuca Ground Search and Rescue went over a 40-metre cliff — at left over Barney's shoulder — with the aid of ropes and pulled Alyssa Albany to safety.

John McKay/Times Colonist

Men go down cliff to save injured teen stuck in waterfall

By LOUISE DICKSON
Times Colonist staff

Lying on a couch yesterday, covered in bumps and bruises, a shy teenager didn't want to talk about her dramatic rescue at the Sooke Potholes. But her parents Fern and Frank Albany were eager to thank their daughter's rescuers.

"I'm just so grateful they were there," said Fern Albany. "It was such a heroic thing. I almost lost my daughter. Every few minutes, my eyes fill with tears."

Fifteen-year-old Alyssa Albany was having so much fun fooling around with her girlfriends Thursday and trying to get on her air mattress, she didn't realize she was caught in a current, said Fern.

"The next thing she knew, she was going over the falls. She was under the water and didn't know which way was up. The water was rushing around and she couldn't see anything. Then she found something, a log, with her foot and pushed up. She managed to climb to a crack in the waterfall as wide as her foot," said Fern.

Emergency crews had to rappel over the sheer cliffs of the potholes to pluck Alyssa, trapped for more than three hours in the waterfall.

That was only the beginning of the dramatic rescue.

High above the canyon, dozens of spectators watched as Sooke firefighter Matt Varney transferred Alyssa in a rescue cradle, safety clip by safety clip, from his harness to Bill Meikle's harness. That was done after one of Varney's ropes jammed on a rocky outcropping.

The transfer took place halfway up the sheer 40-metre cliff.

"It's easy to do a pick-off by yourself," Meikle, 68, search manager for the Juan de Fuca Ground Search and Rescue, said yesterday. "But when you have to make a transfer dangling over water, it takes a lot of muscle and patience."

Using huge cedars as anchors for the rope rescue, about 24 firefighters and search and rescue crews from Juan de Fuca and Metchosin hauled Meikle and Alyssa to safety. The teenager, who had a broken ankle and was shivering with cold, was carried to a waiting ambulance and taken to hospital.

Varney knew it would be a tricky rescue. As he rappelled down the sheer cliff, he slipped and swung like a pendulum over the water for a few minutes before the crew could raise him back up. Varney yelled to Meikle to come down the other side of the cliff with the rescue equipment.

When the firefighter reached Alyssa,



This is what rescuers saw when they arrived at the top of the cliff.

he put his back against the waterfall to block the water from her.

"The force of the water was keeping her pinned up against the rock face and the water had been hitting her at mid-chest level," he said.

With water pouring over his back, Varney shouted over the noise and told her what they were going to do.

"She wanted to get out. She didn't want to get in any part of the water again."

Meikle arrived with a personal floatation device and a rescue cradle for Alyssa and the complicated extraction got underway.

This was the second rescue in five days from the waterfall section beneath the area where a lodge had been part of a development site formerly known as Deertrail. It is upstream from Sooke Potholes Provincial Park. Last Saturday, a woman slipped over the lower falls and injured her back and leg. She was carried out on a stretcher on a steep path.

"Legally, the area is out of bounds," said Meikle. "There are danger signs posted, a fence and a locked gate. People should be cautious."

Still, there's nothing to stop people from walking up the river to the waterfall section.

In 1996, Kyle Easter, a 32-year-old Victoria group-home worker, drowned after slipping into the water and being swept over 12-metre falls while trying to pluck his dog from the river's strong current. A 17-year-old Saanich youth was swept away to his death after falling into the river during a March 1993 camping trip.

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