

Blackfeet police say alcohol ban effective

By Travis Coleman
The Great Falls Tribune

GREAT FALLS, Mont. — A four-day ban on alcohol sales on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation helped temporarily curb traffic deaths and violence, according to tribal police chief.

There were no fatal vehicle crashes on reservation roads and service calls for domestic violence and other disturbances were down by about 70 percent during the annual North American Indian Days from July 10-13, said K. Webb Galbreath, Blackfeet Tribal Police chief.

Despite complaints from merchants in Browning, during a June referendum vote more than 60 percent of tribal members chose to reinstate the ban that was in place between 1999 and 2006.

A ban on alcohol sales on the reservation also is in place for the Heart Butte Society Celebration from Aug. 7-10.

The statistics show the alcohol ban was effective in what it set out to do — keep people safe, Galbreath said.

“It worked pretty well,” he said.

There were six fatalities on the reservation during Indian Days last year, all of which were alcohol related, Galbreath said.

During this year’s Indian Days, police responded to between 99 and 160 calls a day, he said. The number of calls for public intoxication, reckless driving and disturbances increased on July 14, the day after the ban ended, he said.

Not everyone on the reservation reported good news from the ban. Merchants who sell alcohol said the measure cut into their profits. Terry Sitzmann, owner of the Glacier Way Convenience Store in Browning, said he lost out on about \$10,000 during the ban.

Officials with other area businesses said they also lost thousands of dollars a day in alcohol sales during the event.

“It’s definitely an economic hindrance to us,” Sitzmann said, adding that the eight days in which the ban is in effect this year are typically the most fruitful time for alcohol sales.

However, he was one of about five business owners who sell alcohol who supported the referendum as a way to close the controversy.

“We just thought what happens, happens,” he said.

Although there were some people who bought their alcohol before Indian Days, most drove to Cut Bank or East Glacier to buy to buy it during the event, Sitzmann said. He noted that those stores are about 10 to 30 miles off the reservation, so distance was not much of an inconvenience.

“That’s what’s kind of ludicrous about it,” Sitzmann said.

Violet Gilham, owner of the liquor store Icks in Browning, said the safety benefits of the ban cited by proponents of the resolution are not valid. She said the ban put more drunk drivers on the highway, increasing the danger of vehicle crashes.

Galbreath set up a small DUI task force to try to catch more drunken drivers during Indian Days this year. Tribal police were helped in the effort by the Montana Highway Patrol and deputies from the Glacier and Pondera sheriff’s departments.

“We pretty much saturated the whole reservation,” Galbreath said.

Sitzmann said those who sell alcohol can ask for a referendum lifting the ban in 2010. If they choose to do so, he plans to campaign heavily against the ban.

If such an effort is launched, the Blackfeet Community Health Representatives group would likely oppose it. That group pushed for the ban because it believes alcohol is not a part of the tribe’s traditions, said member Patty Welch.

“This year it was nice. It was very quiet,” she said.

Kopp acknowledges harassment complaint

By Megan Holland
Anchorage Daily News

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — The complaint ultimately yielded a letter of reprimand from the city that went into his personnel file but was removed a couple years later after no other complaints were made against him, he said.

The letter told him “don’t ever hug an employee,” he said at a press conference Tuesday afternoon.

Last week, Kopp said there was no history of validated sexual harassment complaints and no job action was taken against him.

Kopp was named head of the state Department Public Safety on July 11 after Gov. Sarah Palin fired Walt Monegan. Palin, who was not available for comment Tuesday, has said through her spokeswoman, Sharon Leighow, that she knew of the complaint but heard it had been found unsubstantiated.

Kopp, 43, told his side of the allegations of sexual harassment at the press confer-

ence held at Alaska State Troopers headquarters in Anchorage. His wife of 21 years, Patricia, stood just outside the door and listened in.

“There is one thing I am not. I am not a sex harasser,” he said. He said the claims against him have challenged his reputation, and “for reasons that I do not know, I have been made the subject of rumor and innuendo.”

But the woman behind the allegation says Kopp isn’t telling the truth about details of their relationship. The Daily News contacted the woman, and she agreed to be interviewed if her name was not used. Kopp defined sexual harassment to the press before telling his story: “In our society, men typically, but not always, are the harassers and women typically are the victims. And this can happen in a couple of ways. Either the boss demands sexual favors from the female subordinate. Or, there is a pattern of conduct called a hostile work environment designed to drive the woman out of the work-

place.

“I did not do either of those things, and I never have,” he said.

Kopp said he was a long-time friend of the complainant’s, and they had a history of greeting each other with a hug before she started working for him. He says he hugged her three or four times while she worked for him. He said at least half of the hugs were initiated by her. “A friend-to-friend hug,” he said.

“I did not kiss her. ... I never sought to make her uncomfortable,” he said.

The woman, though, says a police officer walked in on them as Kopp was kissing her on the right cheek.

“That is a lie. That is not true,” Kopp said.

The woman, reached after the press conference, said much of what Kopp said is not true; other things are distorted. She said, for example, they met when she started working as a dispatcher at the police department, not in high school, as he said.

The hugs, she said, started

when she became his assistant in 2005 and only took place when no one was around, she said.

“He kept trying to build this icky closeness,” she said in a phone interview.

Kopp says he rubbed her neck once because she was in extreme pain. The woman says that she felt uncomfortable in letting him touch her.

The woman told Kopp to stop. But he didn’t and the requests for hugs continued, she said.

The woman complained, and the City of Kenai investigated. Kopp was removed as her boss, and he was sent a letter of reprimand. He appealed the decision, and agreed with the City Council that if no other complaints were filed against him, the letter would be removed from his personnel file.

The letter was ultimately removed from his file.

He said he learned a lesson about sexual harassment and appropriate workplace behavior.

About a year later, the

woman quit her job.

Last Friday, Kopp hand delivered to the Daily News his personnel file from the City of Kenai. Before he did so, the Daily News asked him in a phone interview if complaints would be in the personnel file. He said: “Yes. If there was a history of investigations or things that showed otherwise, you can bet that there’d be a record of it.”

The file, though, had no records of complaints. It contained glowing reviews of his performance as a cop.

“The allegation was not substantiated,” he said on Friday. “The allegation was looked at and vetted by our legal department.”

At Kopp’s first press conference on July 15, he said: “There’s no job action ever taken against me. If there was, I wouldn’t be here with you today.

“Take my transparency at face value, there is no history of these types of complaints.”

Kopp could not be reached for further comment Tuesday after the press conference.

Officials seeking escapee

The Great Falls Tribune

GREAT FALLS, Mont. — Robert War Club, 48, escaped from the jail in Wolf Point with another inmate at about 10 p.m. The other inmate, Jesse Johnson, 20, was caught about noon Tuesday in Poplar, and is back in custody, a jail spokeswoman said.

The two men fled on foot, according to a news release issued by Roosevelt County Sheriff Freedom Crawford. The spokeswoman declined to say how the men escaped because an investigation is ongoing. No one was hurt in the escape.

It wasn’t immediately clear how Johnson made it from Wolf Point to Poplar, a distance of about 20 miles, she said.

War Club was being held on drug charges before his escape. He is considered dangerous, and should not be approached, Crawford said in the release.

War Club is Native American, with black hair and brown eyes. He is 6-feet tall and weighs 278 pounds. He has a tattoo on his left arm that reads “Patty,” and was last seen wearing gray shorts and a black tank-top.

Anyone with information on War Club’s whereabouts is asked to call the Roosevelt County Sheriff’s Office at 406-653-6240, 653-6216 or 653-6230.

There is a reward for information leading to his arrest.



John Brown, the historic preservation officer for the Narragansett American Indian tribe, appears in the Narragansett tribal council chambers, in Charlestown, R.I., Tuesday. Brown said the hundreds of rock mounds near Nipsachuck Hill and swamp, in North Smithfield, R.I., appear manmade and probably mark a burial or ceremonial ground common to several tribes. A Narragansett ceremonial staff appears on the wall behind Brown.

Pechanga to lay off hundreds of workers

By Debra Gruszecki
The Palm Springs Desert Sun

PALM SPRINGS, Calif. — The Pechanga Resort & Casino in Temecula, one of the largest Indian gaming industry employers in California, announced plans Tuesday to lay off up to 400 of its 4,700 employees, a move that trims its workforce by nearly 9 percent.

The economy was blamed. “For months, we have resisted the pressure to lay team members off,” Amy Minniet, president of the Pechanga Development Corp., said in a statement.

“But because of the prolonged economic downturn, we must downsize in order to adjust to the current market conditions and position ourselves for success once the economy recovers.”

As reported on mydesert.com Tuesday evening, the definite number of job cuts and the job types

have yet to be determined.

Minniet noted that a comprehensive severance package, including outplacement services, would be in play.

The news follows reports by economists in Southern California that this portion of the state is in recession. The Los Angeles County Economic Development Corp. and the Kyser Center for Economic Research recently added that the entire state is on the brink of one.

Tourism is down and airports are noting fewer air travelers.

Casinos on Indian reservations, in Las Vegas and on riverboats have noted a dip in revenues, and a tendency on the part of gamers to play tables with lower minimum bets. Play time has fallen. Allure for \$1 slots is fading.

“The fact is consumers are spending less across the board,” said Jacob Mejia, public affairs director for the Pechanga Band of Luiseño

Indians. “They’re still coming out, but they’re playing nickel and penny machines more often. And they aren’t staying as long as they used to.

Tribes in the Coachella Valley could not all be reached for comment Tuesday evening.

But Nancy Conrad, a spokeswoman for the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, another major Indian gaming industry employer in the state, concurred the economy has been a challenge.

But the tribe that operates the Spa Resort Casino in Palm Springs and Agua Caliente Casino Resort Spa in Rancho Mirage has had no massive layoffs, nor plans for them.

“There has been some minor restructuring to adjust for the economy,” she said, but all in all, tribal employment has been fairly constant. “Right now, we’re maintaining.”

Indian cultural center and museum work to proceed

By Michael McNutt
Capitol Bureau

OKLAHOMA CITY — In an effort to keep construction going on at the American Indian Cultural Center and Museum, state officials voted Tuesday to speed up financing of a \$25 million bond issue for the Oklahoma City project.

Contractors are finishing a basement and exterior walls of the \$150 million project and are expected to be done with that part of the construction in September, Gov. Brad Henry said during a meeting of the Oklahoma Capitol Improvement Authority, which authorizes bond funding for the construction of office buildings and other state projects.

State officials can’t get a bond issue done that soon, Henry said. Jim Joseph, the state’s bond adviser, said money from the bond issue — part of the \$475 million deal approved by legislators at the end of this year’s session — wouldn’t be available until

October at the earliest.

Authority members voted to seek interim financing from banks in the state to speed up the process. It’s expected the move will allow money from the bonds to be available in September, said Henry, who serves as the authority’s chairman.

The extra costs of interim financing would be offset by savings generated by keeping the contractor on site and by buying steel a month or so earlier, officials said.

Work to be paid by the \$25 million bond issue will consist of building the rest of the walls and a roof, said John Richard, director of the state Central Services Department.

Private donors will be sought to furnish the museum, Henry said.

“Once the structure is in place it will be very enticing for Oklahoma corporations and others to contribute ... to help us complete the interior,” the governor said.