

DEPARTMENT OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE CONTROL

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License of Bar Suspended for Selling Alcohol to a Minor Who Later Died in Crash *ABC TRACE Investigation began after Fatal Crash*

Hemet – Chappies, a bar located at 229 East Florida Avenue in Hemet will not be allowed to sell alcohol for the next 30 days after an ABC Target Responsibility for Alcohol-Connected Emergencies (TRACE) investigation substantiated that a Chappies bartender sold alcohol to a minor who was later killed in an alcohol-related crash.

A 43 year old Hemet man was arrested back in November, 2007 for selling alcohol to a teenager in June, 2007. The teenager later died in a car crash after leaving Chappies Bar.

Officers from the state Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control arrested 43 year old Bennett Zilonka of Hemet, a bartender at Chappies Bar, for two violations of Section 25658 of the Business and Professions Code. Zilonka is accused of selling drinks to 19 year old James Romero who died later in a car crash.

ABC Investigators opened the investigation on June 8, 2007 following the crash. The investigation revealed the crash victim, James Romero, had a receipt from earlier in the evening indicating he had been a customer at Chappies Bar in Hemet. A Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) analysis by the coroner indicated that Romero had a BAC level of .14.

ABC Investigator Eric Burlingame of the Riverside District was assigned to investigate the case in cooperation with Cpl. Dan Reinboldt of the Hemet Police Department. Through a series of interviews and analysis of evidence, Investigator Burlingame was able to submit a report to the Riverside District Attorney that resulted in the issuance of an arrest warrant for Bennett Zilonka.

Zilonka faces a misdemeanor charge of providing alcohol to a person under age 21. He could face six months in jail and a fine of up to \$1,000 or both.

Gerald Ackley, ABC Supervising Investigator of the TRACE Program thanked the Hemet Police Department for their efforts. ABC worked closely with Hemet Police throughout the course of the TRACE investigation.

Funding for this program is made possible by a California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) grant, through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

The grant provides funding for in-depth ABC investigations of serious incidents including car crashes, but also alcohol overdoses, poisonings, and assaults that result from alcohol consumption by minors.

For more information contact Gerald Ackley in ABC's Southern Division Office at (562) 402-0659.