

HILLIARD NORTHWEST NEWS

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Solebrate! will incorporate Hilliard's new alcohol policy

By KEVIN CORVO

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Hilliard's inaugural celebration of summer, Solebrate! Food and Music Festival, also will be the litmus test for the city's new policy of allowing alcohol to be served in city parks.

The Franklin County Fairgrounds and the adjacent Weaver Park will host the three-day festival June 21-23.

Alcohol sales will be permitted, marking the first time Hilliard has allowed alcohol sales and consumption on city-owned property.

An ordinance allowing the sale and consumption of alcohol on city-owned property was effective April 25.

Destination Hilliard, organizers of Solebrate!, is the first to receive a permit from the city, according to Law Director Tracy Bradford.

"We are being extremely cautious," said Christy Clark, executive director of Destination Hilliard.

Destination Hilliard also has obtained the required permits from the Ohio Department of Commerce's Division of Liquor Control.

Clark said she is cognizant that Solebrate! is a barometer for the city's new policy on alcohol sales, and that the organization is going above and beyond the minimum requirements.

"We are training all our volunteers who will be serving alcohol," Clark said.

A Division of Liquor Control employee will train volunteers how to spot fake identifications, safeguard against people attempting to circumvent standard two-drink per person purchase limits and judge a person's sobriety or intoxication.

Training employees is not a requirement to obtain the permit from the Division of Liquor Control or the city of Hilliard, but it is a prudent precaution, Clark said.

Discussion of the alcohol policy began last year when Hilliard Community Foundation officials said a proposed cultural arts center at the future Hilliard Station Park would never be viable unless alcohol sales were permitted.

Clark said such a policy also was needed to put Hilliard on even ground with communities such as Dublin and Gahanna, where large and successful festivals such as the Dublin Irish Festival and Gahanna's Jazz and Rib Fest allow alcohol sales and consumption.

Hilliard City Council spent the next eight months crafting an acceptable policy that members approved in March.

Hilliard's ordinance restricts alcohol sales and consumption to Roger A. Reynolds Municipal Park, Weaver Park and the future Hilliard Station Park.

Alcohol remains prohibited at all other "pocket parks," such as Conklin Park and Darby Glen Park.

Alcohol also will be permitted at the Old Hilliardfest Art and Street Fair, although the precise location is subject to change as the annual event is planned each year, Bradford said.

The city's policy limits hours of sales from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m., slightly stricter than what the temporary permit from the Division of Liquor Control would otherwise allow.

A key component to the city's new policy is that permits are issued only for events open to the public, Bradford said.

"Events such as a wedding reception could not have alcohol," said Bradford, as it would be assumed such an event is invitation only and not open to the public.

Bradford said the policy was designed to create conditions that only city-sponsored events or those of other public organizations would qualify.

"This policy is specifically for events of a community nature," Bradford said.

Upon application, the person seeking the permit must meet with Hilliard's police chief and safety director to ensure requirements are met.

Those requirements include a liability insurance policy, a "hold harmless" indemnity for the city and the hiring of at least two special duty Hilliard police officers or

Franklin County sheriff's deputies.

The city also can deny the permit.

An applicant would appeal to the mayor, and if the mayor were acting as the safety director, the appeal would be heard at Franklin County Municipal Court.

The same appeal process would apply if the city revoked a permit during the event for just cause.

Clark said the new policy will benefit the city and further its goal to establish destination events.

"By allowing this opportunity with strict guidelines for alcohol at festivals, we believe it will draw more visitors to our events," Clark said.

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