

Underage Drinking Citations On the Rise in Greenville

By John Swartz

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A lot has changed in Greenville over the past several years. Some of the changes have affected traffic, some have altered shopping habits and some have caused a few to put down their cocktails.

After 2003, Greenville police increased their citations for underage alcohol consumption and use of alcoholic beverages in public, according to records released by the department.

“You know, now that you say that, you really can tell it's changed around here,” said Matthew W. Cohen, a political science major at East Carolina University. “I remember going to places a few years ago, and, without admitting to anything, I know there was a lot of underage drinking going on. Now, a lot of those places are shut down. I never really thought about it before, but the Sports Pad and Main Street Beer Company are gone, and that's where we'd always go. You know, before we turned 21.”

In 2003, the city of Greenville issued 163 underage drinking citations. The following year, 189 were issued. The number rose to 231 in 2005.

“I used to have friends come in from other towns, because it was so easy to get by here without a fake ID,” Cohen said. “Of course, we're all over 21 now, but I still have friends who are living the night life, and it seems like they all have a drinking ticket or two.”

Greenville still is a common stop for many. But coming to Pitt County's seat doesn't have the same story line it used to.

“I remember going to Greenville when I was in school because there were so many places you could go if you were underage,” said Steven Ball, a 2005 graduate of N.C. State University. “It was always fun to be able to go out and not have to really worry about getting caught or getting in trouble.”

Since 2004, the Greenville Police Department has increased its underage drinking tickets issued, and many more nights have seen one's hand filled with a pink slip of paper instead of that last beer.

ECU student Daniel Crouse recalls the night he received an underage drinking citation.

“I was at a party when I got mine,” Crouse said. “The cops broke it up, and I was one of the lucky few who got a ticket. It was scary, at first. I got a lawyer and had a choice to write a paper for the court or to go to a class. My lawyer said it would be better if I took the class, so I did that. It's funny how no one talks about underage drinking to you until you've already been caught for it.”

Crouse went on to say that services targeted at students under age 21 might curb the increased number of citations over the past several years.

“The city of Greenville doesn't actually have any programs for that,” said Rhonda Connor, a representative of Greenville Police's records department.

Connor added that there are programs through the university that deal with alcohol and substance abuse prevention, but no specific preemptive alcohol program funding exists within Pitt County or the city.

The 231 underage citations in 2005 were the most in Greenville in recent years, but the police department issued 230 in 2006. So far in 2007, Greenville police officers have issued 189. But numbers are expected to surpass 200 when the totals are in for the entire year.

The increased totals have had a word-of-mouth effect on at least some.

“Everyone checks for IDs now. A lot of times, we don't even try,” said Pollyanna Castro, a 20-year-old Greenville resident. “I don't want to get in trouble, so I'll just say that we stay at home until we're ready to go out, then we go out and have fun and then come back home. It's not worth the risk, going out (and drinking) in public.”

The city of Greenville has also upped the citations for drinking in public. In 2003, 42 citations were issued. That number grew to 137 the following year and has not been lower than 85 in any year since.

“It seems like there's always been the opportunity for cops to take advantage of getting drinking tickets,” Cohen said. “Maybe they're just now going out and getting it done.”

According to an officer in the police department, however, the department has always made underage drinking a high priority.

“I think it's more about people drawing attention to themselves,” said Chris Burack, desk officer with the Greenville Police Department. “We've always tried to eliminate underage drinking and DWIs.”

Ryan Cobey contributed to this story.

Greenville Police Citation Totals

	Underage Drinking	Drinking in Public
2003	163	42
2004	189	137
2005	231	111
2006	230	86

2007, through November	189	119
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