

# SURPRISE REPUBLIC

**VP/GENERAL MANAGER:**  
Michael Ryan, 602-444-5810

**OPINIONS WRITER:**  
Laura McBride, 602-444-6929

**OPINIONS EDITOR:**  
Jennifer Dokes, 602-444-6918

**VISIT OUR BLOG:** Go to [wvblogs.azcentral.com](http://wvblogs.azcentral.com) and then to Plugged In - West Valley

## OUR VIEW

# Copy this smart idea to curb teen drinking

Teen party season is in full swing with proms and after-parties filling weekend schedules through April and high-school graduation celebrations set for May. These are highly anticipated rites of passage, exclamation points on the reality that our kids are growing up.

Unfortunately in the minds of some youngsters, and even among some adults responsible for them, assuming the role of grown-up partier can't be achieved without consuming alcohol. Consequences often are regrettable, if not tragic.

In Buckeye, law-enforcement officials now have a new tool to address underage drinking, a problem the community identified in recent years as a major concern.

A social-host ordinance took effect Friday that holds adults responsible for serving alcohol to minors at private parties or



GETTY IMAGES

other gatherings. The Town Council approved the civil code last month in an effort to raise awareness of the threats to health, public safety and the general well-being of the community.

Under the social-host ordinance, the adult responsible at the property is held responsible when there's evidence of underage drinking. Previously, police

awareness about underage drinking and to improve the health and well-being of minors, not mete out harsh punishment.

The Way Out West Coalition, a local group committed to reducing underage drinking, says 82 percent of Buckeye youth report underage drinking by the time they graduate high school; the average age of first alcohol use in Buckeye is 13; 43 percent of town kids say they drink alcohol at parties when the parents are away; and one in five Buckeye teens say they drink with their parents.

The social-host ordinance tackles underage drinking at the source. A 2008 survey of Buckeye youth found that the alcohol source for 19 percent of underage drinkers was adult family members (22 percent were at home) and 30 percent came from other adults.

Underage drinking is not a problem unique to Buckeye. In

Arizona, nearly three of four high school seniors reported drinking alcohol at least once in their lifetimes.

But Buckeye is unique in the way it's dealing with the problem. Other communities, including Fountain Hills and Tempe, are looking at the path the Southwest Valley community took to change social norms about underage drinking. Other West Valley cities should take a look at Buckeye, too.

Every carefully considered act of good parenting boosts the chances of children growing up to be responsible adults. The social-host ordinance is a new safeguard against adults who were never taught or choose to ignore lessons that highlight distinctions between right and wrong or smart and stupid.

And hosting parties where minors could consume alcohol is wrong and stupid.