

Home / News / Local /

# Ohio seeks to 'Redefine' link between alcohol and fun with new campaign

Published: May 10, 2018 - 2:46 PM | Updated: May 11, 2018 - 2:50 PM



**By Rick Armon**

Beacon Journal/Ohio.com

The alcohol industry is built around advertising that links drinking with having fun.

Spuds MacKenzie was the Bud Light party dog, not a party downer.

Yellow Tail wine had its kangaroo mascot hanging out at the beach and tearing it up as a disc jockey at a rooftop party.

And actor Kiefer Sutherland urges people to have no regrets while pushing Jose Cuervo tequila.

But the Ohio Division of Liquor Control is challenging those messages with a new awareness campaign that emphasizes that an exciting life doesn't have to revolve around alcohol and drinking to excess.

The campaign, called "Redefine" — as in redefining how people, especially youths, view drinking — began this week, with the state rolling out the website <http://www.RedefineOhio.org>, along with dedicated Facebook and Instagram pages.

"While we're in the regulatory business of permitting alcohol sales and we're the biggest retailer of high-proof spirits, we just feel a responsibility to make sure that [drinking is] done responsibly and according to the law," Division of Liquor Control Superintendent Jim Canepa said.

The campaign — funded through \$90,000 in grants from the National Alcohol Beverage Control Association — targets underage drinkers and legal-age drinkers who binge. It also urges alcohol retailers, schools, colleges and others to share the message via social media and materials.

Redefine doesn't use scare-tactic approaches that have been ineffective in the past and instead opts to redefine some alcohol buzz words.

The Redefine website shows photos of happy, smiling youth, many of them engaged in outdoor activities. A photo of a young person swinging upside down over a body of water carries the caption "redefine: hangover," while a photo of three smiling girls holding sparklers has the caption "redefine: lit."

"The objective was not to be preachy but to be positive in our messaging," Canepa said. "We've seen a lot of negative preaching and it doesn't work. You really need to tap into that 12- to 13-year-old teenage mentality that looks at life a little differently, while at the same time providing a toolkit, if you will, to the alcohol retailers that makes it easy for them to buy into the campaign."

He added that the state isn't saying people can't enjoy alcoholic beverages, but they need to do it responsibly.

The state estimated that nearly 20 percent of Ohio adults have engaged in binge drinking in the last month.

Ohio high school students reported having their first drink by 13, and about 90 percent of alcohol consumption among youth under 21 is in the form of binge drinking, according to the state.

Meanwhile, the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism estimated alcohol consumption in Ohio at 2 gallons per capita a year for those age 14 or older.

It's unclear whether the state initiative can make a difference in attitudes and behaviors. Alcohol companies spent about \$2.1 billion advertising their products in 2016 on TV, radio, outdoors and in print, according to the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth. Numbers were not available for online spending.

The Wholesale Beer & Wine Association of Ohio, which represents beer and wine distributors, is in favor of the program.

“It’s a very big deal for our members,” spokesman Bob Tenenbaum said. “We’re very supportive of this campaign or any campaign that aims at educating young people about the potential dangers of over consumption.”

Darryl Brake, executive director of the Summit County Community Partnership, also supports the Redefine campaign because it’s another effort to promote prevention.

“What we forget about when we talk about all the drugs, even with the opiates and heroin and emergence of medical marijuana and prescription drugs, with all that going on, we fail to remember and keep at the forefront of our minds that alcohol is a drug and there is more alcohol permeating our community than all those others,” he said.

The Summit County Community Partnership is launching a campaign now — around high school graduation time — to host alcohol-free and drug-free parties. The effort is called “Parents Who Host Lose the Most.”

Rick Armon can be reached at 330-996-3569 or [رارمون@thebeaconjournal.com](mailto:رارمون@thebeaconjournal.com). Read his beer blog at <http://www.Ohio.com/beer>. Follow him on Twitter at @armonrickABJ.