



Curbing underage drinking

Businesses buying scanning devices that display ages

By Karen Zapf
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Servers at Primanti Brothers in Robinson Township are feeling more confident these days about not being duped into serving alcohol to underage patrons.

That's because the eatery recently purchased the Viage scanner, which uses the information embedded in the magnetic strip of a driver's license to reveal the actual age and birth date of the license holder and whether the license is valid. The license is swiped through the machine much like a credit card, and the device displays the person's age in bold numbers on a large screen.

Managers at Primanti Brothers joined Allegheny County District Attorney Stephen A. Zappala Jr. on Tuesday at the Parkway Tavern in Monroeville to promote the scanner in an effort to reduce underage drinking.

"With our type of business, we employ a lot of young people, 18, 19 and 20 who are unfamiliar with out-of-state identification and are uncomfortable questioning (patrons)," said Marc Teklinski, manager of Primanti Brothers. "They feel comfortable with this machine at hand."

The scanner costs \$295. Monroeville Mayor Sean Logan, who heads the consumer protection department in Zappala's office, said the Viage scanner can read magnetic strips on licenses from 32 states.

Zappala said he chose Monroeville to promote the high-tech device in part because an underaged man from Fast Pittsburgh was



Warren L. Leec@er/Tribune-Ro
The Viage scanner, about the size of a compact disc player, can read the age of a person whose license is

Businesses buying license scanners

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driving drunk four years ago on James Street and crashed, killing his 16-year-old brother.

Brian Winwood, then 19, had a blood-alcohol reading of 0.22 percent, more than twice the legal limit for operating a motor vehicle. He was driving a 1992 Chevrolet Camaro at 80 to 90 mph in a 35 mph zone.

Winwood was sentenced to two years in a halfway house in the death of his brother, Timothy.

"If it saves one person's life, we're moving in the right direction," Zappala said.

Logan said the scanner also will be promoted to convenience stores to help deter those who are underage from attempting to buy tobacco products.

David Fuhrer of Frank B. Fuhrer Wholesale Co., a South Side beer wholesaler, said the company

is buying 10 units, which are about the size of a compact disc player, and will donate them to the District Attorney's Office "to use as he sees fit."

Gary Pugliano, owner of the Parkway Tavern, said the restaurant soon will have a Viage scanner.

"We keep a pretty good knack (on detecting underage drinkers)," Pugliano said. "But anything you can get to possibly deter underage drinking, we are all for it."

The Viage scanner, which has been on the market for almost a year, was developed by Cardcom Technology in Buena Park, Calif.

*The local distributor is Total Systems Control of Large, Pa.

Teklinski said the scanner has helped deter underage patrons from attempting to buy alcohol.

"You go from a table ordering a pitcher of beer to ordering one beer," Teklinski said.