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Voters approve alcohol propositions

Businesses could start serving drinks by early November

By Nicholas Sakelaris
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Twenty-six years ago, Mansfield resident David Duke set out to do what some considered impossible: Garner enough support to allow beer and wine sales in Mansfield's retail stores.

"My home is here, and I'd rather buy my beer and wine in Mansfield," Duke said in a Mansfield News-Mirror article dated Oct. 4, 1979.

However, his petition drive got caught in loopholes. Support dwindled and Mansfield remained a dry city.

Until Saturday.

More than 80 percent of voters approved Propositions 1 and 2, according to unofficial election results released Saturday night.

Proposition 1, which allows for beer and wine sales at grocery stores and gas stations for off-site consumption, received 2,438 votes (80.3 percent). Proposition 2, which allows restaurants to sell mixed drinks, beer and wine without operating as a private club, passed by 2,477 votes (81.8 percent).

Mansfield businesses can begin applying for their alcohol licenses after the votes are canvassed Sept. 20.

It typically takes 45 to 60 days for a business to receive its alcohol license, so consumers could expect to see alcohol on the shelves by early November, said Carolyn Beck, public information officer for the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission.

Restaurants that sell alcohol as a private club also have to apply for an alcohol license.

Support for the propositions was gathered by Taxpayers Excited About Mansfield, a political action group that gathered 4,900 signatures to put the propositions on the ballot and raised more than \$42,000 for the campaign.

The contributions came from grocery stores, gas stations and restaurants, according to expense reports. The group contends that Mansfield has been losing tax revenue to surrounding cities such as Grand Prairie and Arlington.

"This is just another tool for Mansfield to be on the same level as everyone else around us," said Tom Ritter, who led the PAC. "It's stupid to dump tax money in other cities."

However, not everyone celebrated the results of Saturday's election. "Evil abounds when good people do nothing," said Joey Faust, pastor of Kingdom Baptist Church, as he took in the election results. "There is going to be a lot more crime. There are going to be a lot more wrecks."

He was dismayed that there wasn't any organized opposition to the pair of propositions. He and half a dozen church parishioners talked to voters outside the Tarrant County Subcourthouse on election day.

Ritter said the referendums were more of a business decision than a moral issue. He cited two to three businesses that wouldn't come to the city unless the referendums passed.

"We don't believe that alcohol is the root of all evil. It's the abuse of alcohol," Ritter said.

Gone also are the days where restaurant employees have to pick up alcohol from the distributors and bring it into the city. The elimination of the private club system allows for delivery of alcohol to restaurants by distributors.

Greg Kunasek said he supported both propositions because they will make it more convenient to purchase alcohol.

"It's no different than any other freedom. Exercise it responsibly," Kunasek said.

His wife, Sandy Kunasek, said she voted for Proposition 2, but didn't support Proposition 1 because it increases the likelihood of children and teen-agers being exposed to alcohol.

"I don't like for young kids to be going through the grocery store and see Budweiser stands and Coors stands. Especially when the girls are scantily dressed and it represents something I don't approve of."

Among the requirements the TABC examines when issuing an alcohol license are whether the business owner has been a resident in Texas for at least one year and has any felony convictions, Beck said.

Restaurant, grocery and convenience store employees can also receive TABC certification, which teaches employees how to avoid selling to minors or intoxicated persons. Businesses with certified staff could be immune from violations by an employee in some circumstances, Beck said.

Though it took more than a quarter of a century, Duke, a lifelong resident of Mansfield, was pleased that enough support was finally gathered for the measures. He said he attributes the city's growing population in the past decade for shifting support for alcohol sales.

"It's the best thing that could happen to Mansfield," Duke said. "It makes me feel like things should have been done a long time ago."