

# Youth team up with local stores to curb alcohol theft

By Aaron West  
TriPLICATE staff writer

A group of local high school students looking to combat teen alcohol theft and abuse in Crescent City is making headway.

Almost a year after the Coastal Connection Youth Organizing Project presented their plan to reduce alcohol theft in the area, the group has reportedly made some progress, according to its presentation at the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors meeting last Tuesday, where the team received a standing ovation.

Members of the Coastal Connection Project, a group that brings teens together during the summer to explore issues relevant to youth and make change in the community, were inspired to take action after its members noticed how easy it was for their peers to steal alcohol.

"The theft of alcohol was so easy that my friends and I would go to steal alcohol at least twice a day from local stores," an anonymous youth told the group, according to the presentation.

So the CCYOP, with the help of Melissa Darnell, who assisted in organizing the project, sprang into action. First they spoke with local law enforcement to find out exactly what they were dealing with.

"We learned that the youngest person to be prosecuted for alcohol theft in Del Norte County was 11," Alberto Gonzalez, a student at Castle Rock Charter School, said during the presentation.

The student's investigation led them to Safeway, where they had discovered a majority of the thefts had been taking place — "one youth had been able to steal 22 bottles of alcohol at one time," Gonzalez said.

They met with Brian Ridgely, Crescent City Safeway general manager, and got to work. After meeting with the group, Ridgely took several actions, including: closing one store entrance door after 10 p.m.; blocking access to the alcohol aisle after 2 a.m.; locking the bathrooms, which teens would use as a "staging area" for theft, Ridgely said;

See Alcohol / A12

# ALCOHOL

Continued from A11

equipping all bottles of hard alcohol with anti-theft caps and increasing cooperation with city police.

"I've worked in 17 stores in the 21 years I've worked for Safeway, and I've got to tell you that the Crescent City Police Department is head and shoulders above any other places I've worked. Their response time is spot on, and they've been very supportive," Ridgely said.

He also pointed out that as a result of the CCYOP's efforts, they now have in-store security that monitors the store.

"Over the course of four days we had 13 arrests, and by and large most of that was alcohol-related theft," Ridgely said, adding that most of those arrested were older people.

Ridgely, who will be overseeing Safeway's inventory procedure this week, said that no specific numbers are available right now, but from what he can tell he's seen a 30- to 45-percent improvement in shrink and total loss.

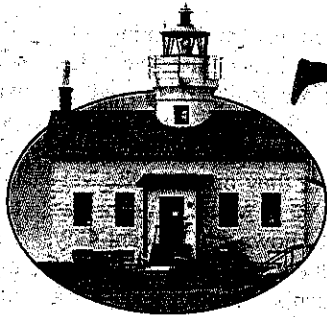
"I was very impressed. None of the changes in my store would have taken place without (CCYOP's) input,"

Ridgely said. "They saved me a ton of money."

The group's work wasn't over yet, however. During the presentation, Gonzalez and co-presenter Mai Thao, a student at Del Norte High School, said that after Safeway was locked down, local teens set their sights on Walmart as a destination for alcohol theft. So at the beginning of summer CCYOP went there. At that store, Manager Nick Gonnella put in place a number of measures similar to Safeway's, as well as other strategies, like revising shifts and schedules to provide greater coverage of the alcohol aisle during high theft times as well as holding various store meetings in that area to cut down on loss. Although it's too early to say what the results are, Gonnella said he appreciates the youths' involvement.

"I was very excited when they came to the store. A lot of times people present what they believe to be a problem without coming with any type of solution to help with that problem," Gonnella said. "What was great about (CCYOP) was not only did they come here and talk about concerns, but they also came with solutions. That was very cool to see."

Reach Aaron West at [awest@triplicate.com](mailto:awest@triplicate.com).



# Del Norte TRIPPLICATE

Serving our community since 1879

[www.triplicate.com](http://www.triplicate.com)