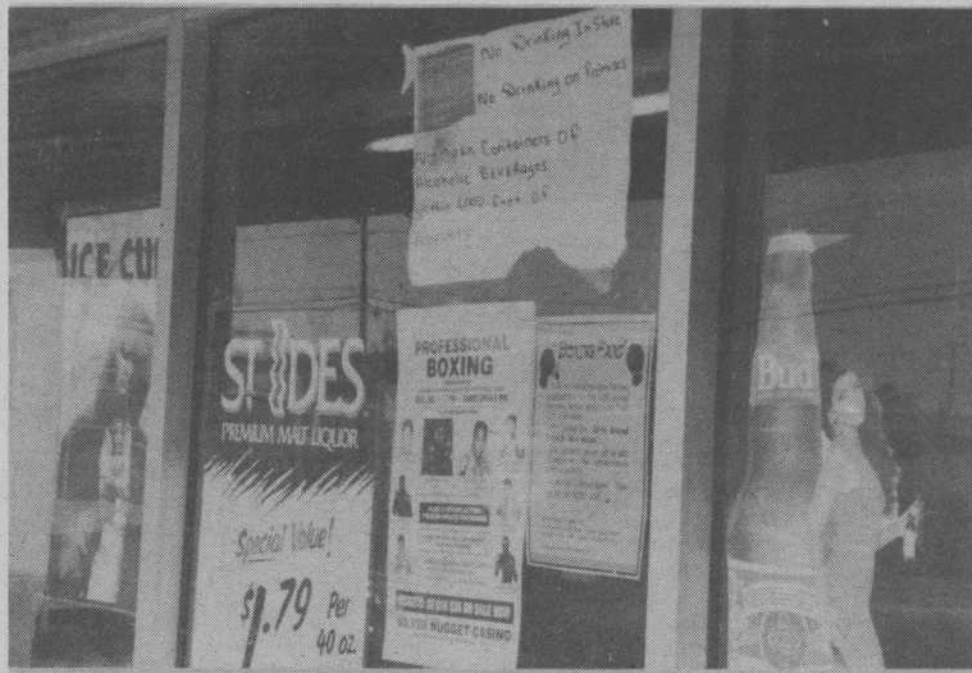


BOOZE IN THE HOOD



A & K Market, like many West Las Vegas convenience stores, display beer advertising on front windows.

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liquor.

Metropolitan Police Department Lieutenant, Mike Ault, doesn't provide a concrete percentage of the amount of alcohol related incidents of violence, but he does acknowledge a general perception of a 75-80% correlation. "Violence and substance abuse has an alarmingly large correlation," says Ault. Ault commands the Metro Gang Unit, a special unit designed to implement preventative and enforcement measures to the city's gang problem. As a 21-year veteran of the force, Ault says he has seen a dramatic transition in the level of gang activity within the city. "Kids no longer have respect for their parents nor the law," says Ault. He says the escalation of single-parent households in which the mother plays dual parenting roles has contributed to the reckless behavior kids currently exhibit.

Alcohol, in Ault's opinion, simply adds fuel to an already explosive situation.

While the West Las Vegas community enjoys its share of alcohol related incidents of violence, Ault says this area compares little with the North East, 89106, area of the city, which has the highest level of drive-by shooting related incidents. Metro has suspected for numerous years that the presence of alcohol in the community plays a significant role in the severity and number of incidents, according to Ault. During an official experiment conducted in May, 1993, Metro targeted the NE area for alcohol suppression to determine if it would have a direct result on the number of shootings and related incidents.

The experiment was inclusive of strict enforcement of curfew and juvenile drinking laws. The study provided conclusive evidence to the correla-

tion between drinking and violent behavior when a dramatic drop in incidents was documented. Ault says the study came about after a US News and World Report article, "A Potent Brew: Booze and Crime (May '93)", explored the deep-seeded causal effects of alcohol and the '92 riots. Additional justification for the study was the individual observations of Metro officers. "In numerous interviews with gang members after drive-by shootings, we found that the majority occurred after parties where binge drinking took place," says Ault.

An internal report which critiqued the experiment, officers cited a nearly 60% reduction in the amount of violent incidents. Why can't this operation become standard procedure? Ault says it is a resource issue-not having a sufficient amount of officers to provide 24 hour enforcement to this area. But Ault says the main

responsibility must fall on the hands of parents and the community to police their own. The main issue, says Ault, is values within the family. He says the breakdown of the family unit is largely responsible for the current problems with youths, who utilize alcohol as an escape from their problems. "If we have parents who don't have skills, don't give them food stamps-give them training," says Ault.

The desolation of the family unit is perpetuated from generation to generation, says Ault. Ault says drinking is seen as a youth's rights-of-passage. "You could say that drinking is perceived as an adult activity. By drinking, kids feel they will make that adult transition."

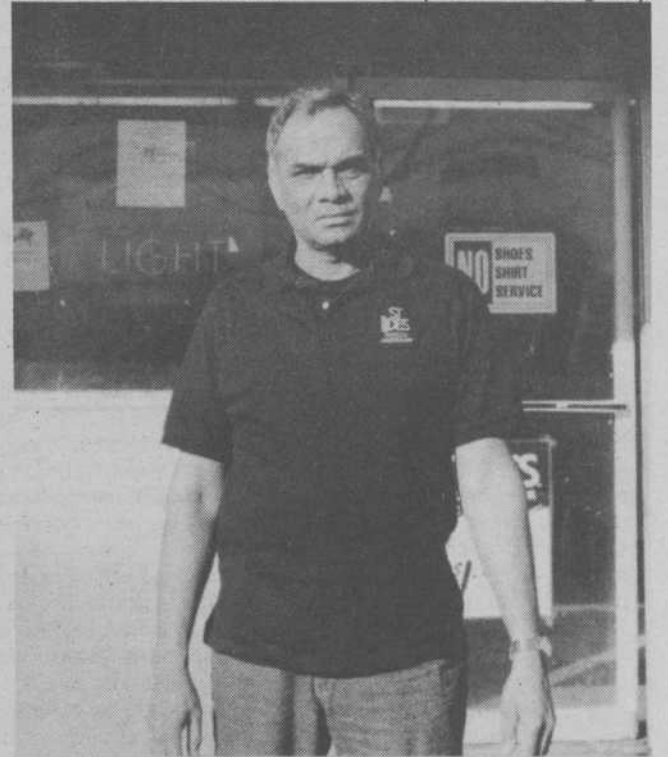
While parents must realize their responsibility to nurture their children, Ault says the store owners must realize a commitment to the community. Ault credits convenience store owners of the NE area for their cooperation during the May experiment, but says the effort must be combined with community participation. In the West Las Vegas area, the availability of alcohol is particularly evident as a liquor outlet can be found on virtually every major intersection.

One location on the corner of

Englestead and Lake Mead, The A & K Market, is a prime location for the purchase of beer and alcohol. The store has been the target of police as well as gang related violence. Once the haven for gang members and drug dealers, the store has undergone a transformation by enforcing its loitering ordinance. The amount of alcohol available at the store is, indeed, stagger-

ing. Approximately 2/3's of the shelf space is devoted to malt liquor and other forms of alcohol. Store owner, Babu Thakor, says the store doesn't sell any more alcohol than any of his competitors. He also feels a degree of intimidation from gang members, who frequent the store on various occasions brandishing handguns, demanding serv-


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A & K store owner feels intimidated into selling alcohol by local gang members who have murdered one of his clerks.

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