

County PA forms panel to mull teen alcohol policies

By **BOB WATSON**
News Tribune

Cole County Prosecutor Bill Tackett said Saturday he is forming a panel of county community leaders to help his office determine punishment options for underage drinking cases.

Tackett said it's no secret that many teens attend parties where booze flows freely.

He said adults throughout Cole County are telling him teens' alcohol abuse is their biggest concern — even among adults who drank when they were teenagers.

Tackett noted prosecutors have unique tools to use in handling cases, ranging from community service in lieu of charges to "throwing the book" at the offenders and seeking the stiffest punishments possible.

In between are efforts to help teens understand they've broken the law and reasons for that law's existence, coupled with types of community-service programs that, sometimes, can allow the teens to clear their records.

In his conversations with adults, Tackett said, some complain that area teens are "getting away" with their lawlessness, while others tell him law enforcement is too tough on kids who just want to have innocent fun.

Heading the new panel will be Jim Rackers, former Helias High School principal; Chris Straub, former Jefferson City Public Schools superintendent; Edward D. "Chip" Robertson, former state Supreme Court chief justice and practicing attorney, who currently has children in high school; and Sue Lear, a long-time community activist whose children are out of high school.

They will be asking others from throughout the county to help with the work.

Tackett said teens charged with alcohol violations can't be assigned to drug court, which relies on drug testing. Alcohol leaves the body relatively quickly, so urine analysis isn't effective.

He wants teens to know there are consequences to violating the law, and he wants community support to get that message across.

People who have ideas for the committee should send them to the Cole County Prosecutor's Office, 311 E. High St.; Jefferson City, MO 65101