

## Concessionaires team up to strike out drunken driving

By Elissa Elan

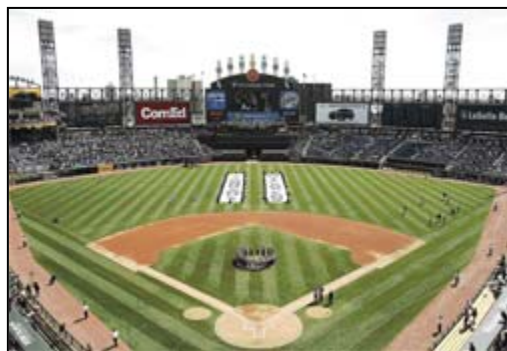
(April 24) - With Major League Baseball's new season in full swing, concessionaires are pursuing preventive measures they hope will cut down on drunken driving and fan violence — some incidents of which recently have led to costly litigation for on-site operators.

Through designated-driver programs, server education aimed at responsible alcohol service, strict rules governing alcohol service and smaller drink sizes, concessionaires say they are working to put the brakes on excessive drinking by ballpark attendees.

"Certainly we take the sale of alcohol at all of our venues very seriously," said Gael Doar, director of communications for Spartanburg, S.C.-based Centerplate Inc., a contract foodservice company specializing in sports and convention center venues, whose accounts include Yankee Stadium in New York. "Every year we make a big effort to train and retrain our employees so they know what the rules are and what [behaviors] to look out for when serving people. And recognizing certain signs in people is certainly part of the training."

Centerplate as well as such contractors as Delaware North, Aramark and Levy Restaurants have joined forces in recent years with sports teams, beer manufacturers, broadcasters and traffic safety experts to form **TEAM Coalition**, an organization dedicated to promoting responsible drinking and positive fan behavior at sports facilities.

In 2005, 225,000 baseball fans and 24,000 employees across all leagues, including the National Hockey League, the National Basketball Association, the National Football League and Major League Soccer, participated in the designated driver program, according to Jill Pepper, executive director of TEAM Coalition. This year all 30 MLB teams are participating in the program, which will feature such incentives as tickets to the World Series and the All-Star Game at PNC Park in Pittsburgh.



For the third year in a row, U.S. Cellular Field in Chicago is operating a designated-driver program that offers incentives to participants.

But some critics say that designated-driver programs alone are not enough to protect the public's safety.

"Although designated-driver programs may be well-intentioned and of some small benefit, it is conscientious training, adherence to policy and a consistent monitoring of the stands and removing intoxicated fans causing problems that is important," said Laurie Leiber, a spokeswoman for the Marin Institute, a San Rafael, Calif.-based group that monitors the alcohol industry.

"It may be good PR, but it is not good prevention," Leiber added. "The research on those programs shows that most people who practice designated driving are not

designated to be alcohol-free. The person is more like the least drunk [individual]. In many cases, the designated driver may drink less or more slowly, but he or she will not be 100 percent sober."

Pepper of TEAM Coalition said the group focuses on more than just providing incentives for those who participate in the designated-driver program, including employee training.

"We operate training for all of our employees, including the ticket sellers and the ushers," she said. "We teach them what the absorption rate factors are [based on] the size of the person, blood alcohol content and how strong the drinks are as well as what policies are in place at each venue and the state laws. They need to know how best to implement those rules and regulations and communicate with the fans what the codes of conduct are and what the ramifications are if they don't adhere to those regulations."

Doar of Centerplate noted that her company not only emphasizes alcohol service training to employees, but also deters overdrinking by offering patrons different drink sizes. At Yankee Stadium, Centerplate this year is selling beer in 20-ounce and 24-ounce sizes. The 20-ounce version is \$8.75, and the 24-ounce size costs \$1 more, or \$9.75.

Pepper of TEAM Coalition said that the current service standard at ballparks is two beers per customer per transaction and that the average beverage size is approximately 22 ounces. She further stated that TEAM keeps track of all service regulations at the various ballparks, and that the 22-ounce cup size is not a league regulation.

"We maintain a survey at the club level and work with the league to make sure of what the averages are," she said. "But at the World Series and the All-Star Game, the drinks are no larger than 20 ounces and no more than two beers per transaction are sold."

Nonetheless, the Marin Institute's Leiber indicated that both TEAM and the various concessionaires need to come up with better practices in serving alcohol more responsibly to sports fans.

"There's so much they could be doing that would be more effective," she said. "They could reduce the serving size of alcohol served in the stadiums and increase the price of the drinks."

According to Rick Abramson, president of Sportservice, a division of Buffalo, N.Y.-based Delaware North Cos., this year the company has downsized the size of the alcoholic beverages it sells at the stadiums where it operates.

"We're on the board of TEAM Coalition and have the designated-driver program at almost all of our ballparks," he said. "We cut off sales at designated times and we've limited the size of the drinks. Everyone — no matter what they do — is responsible and everyone must be on alert. We're very diligent on that. It's pretty tough to be 100 percent, but that's our goal."

Sportservice, which last year reported annual sales of \$450 million, this year stopped selling a 32-ounce beer at Busch Stadium in St. Louis. The company now offers 16-ounce and 24-ounce drinks, a Delaware North spokeswoman said.

"The 32-ounce beer was indeed only sold at Busch Stadium," she said. "No other Sportservice venue had a beer this large going into this year's season, and now it has been eliminated at Busch as well. This was done in an effort to encourage more responsible drinking."

Officials for Philadelphia-based Aramark Corp., which in 2005 was found liable for \$110 million for selling beer in 1999 to a drunken fan at a N.Y. Giants football game who later crashed his car and paralyzed a 4-year-old girl, were unavailable at presstime. In addition, a Colorado man, Jeff Black, alleged he was verbally abused and pelted with beer by two drunken fans at a Colorado Rockies baseball game in 2004. Black sued Aramark in 2005 for continuing to sell alcohol to the already intoxicated fans, who were eventually removed from the stadium by security. That case is still pending.

A spokesman for the company said Aramark adheres to a strict policy of responsible alcohol service.

TEAM Coalition's Pepper said that responsible alcohol consumption is the result of a partnership between the concessionaires and the fans drinking the beverages.

"It is important that policies are in place to make sure of what is responsible service, but ultimately it is up to the fans," she said. "We're looking for a degree of trust between those who provide and those who consume. If someone has it in mind to be irresponsible, they will, but the vast majority of those who attend any of the league's games do act responsibly. We need to do a better job of promoting that. It's a small amount of bad apples that spoil it for the rest of the fans. We encourage responsible behavior and reward responsible behavior.

"Our entire staff is committed to pursuing these programs," she added. "The positive financial picture of the sporting experience only works if the fans come to the games, and they'll only come if they think it's safe. The economics of this industry will make this program work. If the fans won't bring their kids [to games] because they think it's not safe, then the industry will lose money."