

Winter Garden now allows alcohol sales on Sundays

By RICH MCKAY
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

WINTER GARDEN — Starting Sunday, beer will flow from the tap at Benchwarmer's Sports Bar, ending the last local remnant of an age when alcohol sales were restricted on Sundays.

Winter Garden is the last Orange County government to repeal a "blue law" meant to encourage sobriety on the Christian day of worship.

Blue laws date to Puritan Massachusetts and, in many communities, once banned not only alcohol but all business on Sunday.

The City Commission wiped the law from its books Thursday night, but not before getting an earful from a dozen pastors and residents.

"All I can say is, what's wrong with being different?" said the Rev. Reynold Lemp of Calvary Baptist Church, who for years has fought efforts to

relax Winter Garden's rules. "So what if it costs someone a few bucks because we don't sell alcohol on the Lord's day?" he said.

City Attorney A. Kurt Ardaman said the repeal puts Winter Garden businesses on equal footing with their competition in Orange County and neighboring cities and towns, where the Sunday sale and consumption of alcohol has long been legal.

For supporters, the issue is

about dollar signs. Tony Blair, the owner of Benchwarmer's, said being closed on Sundays costs him thousands of dollars.

"If I can't sell on Sundays, it isn't fair," he said, "because people could just go almost anywhere down the road for a beer and wings and watch a game."

Resident Derek Blakeslee pointed out that the community has changed over time. The city's population has

tripled to about 30,000 since 1990. With that growth has come restaurants, bars and people who want to be able to drink at a bar on Sundays.

"We can't continue to make our residents drive outside of Winter Garden to make their purchases," Blakeslee said.

The West Orange Chamber of Commerce also pushed for the change.

The new rule was approved by a 4-to-1 vote — the majority said they were re-

flecting the wishes of their constituents — with Mayor John Rees casting the dissenting vote.

Rees said it was a tough decision.

"Sometimes you have to vote as your constituents want, and sometimes you vote your conscience," he said.

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Estranged wife's killer gets death

By AMY L. EDWARDS and RENE STUTZMAN
SENTINEL STAFF WRITERS

SANFORD — A Vietnamese immigrant who stabbed his estranged wife to death in front of her teenage daughter was sentenced to death Friday by a Seminole County judge.

Tai Pham, 36, was convicted earlier this year of first-degree murder in the death of Phi Ai "Amy" Pham.

Pham, 32, was stabbed at least six times after she returned home from a date in October 2005.

Prosecutors sought the death penalty, and in May, a jury recommended death for Tai Pham.

Pham did not speak to the judge during Friday's hearing. Though he was shackled, Pham twice made obscene gestures toward family members and reporters in the courtroom.

Court Judge Marlene Alva recapped details of the crime and testimony made earlier about Pham's life.

Pham had a difficult childhood — including working in a prison camp before fleeing Vietnam. He later lived at an orphanage in Illinois.

But Alva found that the aggravating circumstances in his case outweighed the mitigating and rendered the death sentence.



DENNIS WALL/ORLANDO SENTINEL FILE

Tai Pham appears in a Seminole County courtroom in March on trial for murder.

Pham, an electronics repairman, and Amy Pham had been separated about two years when the slaying occurred.

On Oct. 22, 2005, Tai Pham went to his estranged wife's Altamonte Springs apartment. The only person home was his stepdaughter Lana, then 13. Pham grabbed her by the hair and dragged her into her bedroom, where he tied her up, she testified.

He had two knives, and they waited in her room for her mother to return from her date, the girl said.

When Lana saw her mother in the doorway, she called out a warning, but it did no good. Tai Pham attacked the woman, Lana said.

When Amy's boyfriend, Christopher Higgins, walked into the apartment, Pham attacked him as well. He fought back, and he and Tai Pham suffered several stab wounds.

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TRIAL

FROM PAGE B1

proved him to be guilty."

Still, he said he would not use the T-shirt during the next trial, which could begin as early as January. He also said he would not present testimony from people who testified during the original trial and later recanted.

One witness, someone who placed Dillon near the murder scene, is dead. But Holmes plans to read his testimony during the new trial.

Seth Miller, executive director of the Innocence Project of Florida, said Dillon shouldn't have been convicted originally and that the state doesn't have enough to convict him during the next trial.

The Innocence Project also helped Wilton Dedge, a Brevard County man convicted in a 1981 rape and freed after 22 years when the DNA of semen taken from the victim proved he was not the rapist.

Dedge was released and awarded \$2 million to com-



GEORGE SKENE/ORLANDO SENTINEL FILE

For over a quarter of a century, Bill Dillon has insisted he was not the one who beat another man to death in Brevard County.

pensate for his wrongful conviction. A state law passed in May awards wrongly convicted people \$50,000 for every year they were incarcerated if they meet certain criteria.

Dillon is scheduled for a bond hearing Tuesday, and Miller hopes that the mur-

der charge will be dropped at that time.

"They clearly saw the need to grant Mr. Dillon a new trial," Miller said. "There's a viable claim of innocence."

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SCOUT

FROM PAGE B1

bration. They'll gather to dedicate The Celebration Veterans Memorial, the labor of love that Simon, who belonged to Boy Scout Troop 125, chose for his Eagle Scout project.

In doing so, they'll celebrate a special pact, born of a friendship so strong that Bradley refused to allow Simon's dream to go unfulfilled even after his friend passed away.

Three summers ago, Simon sold commemorative American flag pins on the Fourth of July. The pins brought in \$7,000, and his project was off and running. But the following month, life tripped Simon up. He fell ill, stricken with an aggressive form of leukemia.

With Simon undergoing treatment, and fighting fevers, nausea and pneumonia, his comrades tended to his project. They raised

more than \$12,000 toward the \$40,000 budget.

Halfway through Simon's 30-month treatment regimen, doctors knew the cancer would win — long before the monument ever would come to fruition.

But Simon was determined he'd die an Eagle Scout. Last November, he slid off his oxygen mask, endured his Eagle Scout interview, and, one last time, gasped the Scout Oath.

He died the next day at age 16.

But he made sure his dream would live on. Bradley didn't know why his friend had to die so young. But he knew this much: The race Simon had begun was one he'd finish.

There were challenges. The \$40,000 budget swelled to \$80,000. And even as the project got under way, Bradley faced a significant shortage.

"Especially after we started, I was very nervous that this might not happen," the 16-year-old says. "We were [short] \$20,000, but finally made up the difference."

Bradley did his utmost to close the gap — such as collecting about \$7,500 at a recent Veterans of Foreign Wars national convention.

In the end, Simon and Bradley helped raise about \$75,000.

The monument includes star-shaped paving, landscaping and a seat wall surrounding a 40-foot flagpole. It will also feature a plaque bearing Simon's name and image and the story behind the project.

Sometimes this morning, Bradley will speak, thanking everyone who helped with a good word, a good deed or a good deal of money. But most of all, he'll remember the guitar-playing Scout who conceived it all.

"I'm so proud to finish this project, or actually to be a part of the project, to make sure his [Simon's] dreams came to completion," Bradley says.

Truth be told, the monument still could use a coat of paint, Bradley says. And another \$5,000 for cosmetic repairs wouldn't hurt.

But he got it done. He kept his vow. Simon's dream lives.

"He'd probably pat me on the back and give me one of those crazy no-teeth smiles," Bradley says.

An old Army barracks ballad reminds us that old soldiers never die; they just fade away.

But thanks to an enduring friendship, generations will sing the praises of both fallen soldiers and a gone-too-soon Eagle Scout.

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CAYLEE

FROM PAGE B1

will be around for some time.

"It's not a one-shot deal. Dr. Lee is contracted for the life of the case," Black said.

Who is Henry Lee?

The Connecticut-based criminalist's résumé includes work on the cases of JonBenet Ramsey and Laci Peterson. Lee has decades of experience and hundreds of murder cases under his belt and is known for charisma on the stand and ability to explain complex science in a way that juries understand.

What did he do Friday?

He inspected the car's interior, including the trunk. He looked at car-carpet samples and a tire cover, said Or-

ange sheriff's spokesman Capt. Angelo Nieves.

Why do investigators think Caylee was in the car?

Casey Anthony's parents said the Pontiac smelled like a dead body had been inside. Casey's father, George, told investigators the stench was so horrible that he could not breathe while he was inside the car. A cadaver dog, trained specifically to seek out the smell of human decomposition, hit on the trunk of the car.

What evidence was in the trunk?

A stain in the trunk sparked interest of authorities early on. Investigators have given few details about the stain, but George Anthony described it as about the size of a basketball, ac-

ording to documents.

Residue of chloroform was on a tire cover in the trunk, according to reports released to the public this month. A research scientist noted in a report to the Sheriff's Office that the chemicals found in the air from the trunk were consistent with human decomposition.

What's next?

Casey Anthony is expected in court at 9 a.m. Dec. 11 for a pretrial conference. The judge is also expected to rule on motions regarding a check-fraud case against her.

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