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Ind. liquor stores end year dry Indiana liquor laws ban Sunday sales

Some fear loss of sales to Louisville and call for change in longstanding Sunday ban

Louisville's liquor stores are enjoying a double shot of extra business this holiday season, and in many cases it's coming from customers from Southern Indiana.

For the first time since August 2005, when Louisville opened the door to Sunday liquor sales, New Year's Eve -- typically one of the liquor industry's busiest days of the year -- falls on a Sunday, as did Christmas Eve.



"They are kind of cutting us off dry on Sunday," said Donna Harvey as she left Al's Cut Rate Liquors in Jeffersonville, Ind. She was talking about a law that closes Indiana liquor stores on Sundays. (By Keith Williams, The Courier-Journal)

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Ernest Hunter, 36, lives in Jeffersonville, Ind., and said he thinks his state's alcohol laws are outdated and should be changed to mirror those in Louisville.

"Keep the money here instead of letting it go across the bridge," Hunter said during a recent visit to Al's Cut Rate Liquors in Jeffersonville.

It's a bit out of the ordinary for Hoosiers to cross the river to take advantage of Louisville's laws. Kentuckians flock to Indiana to buy high-powered fireworks for the Fourth of July and they head to its riverboat casinos all year long to gamble.

The amount of tax money that Indiana has lost to Kentucky from Sunday alcohol sales is unknown, but Brad Klopfenstein, executive director of the Indiana Licensed Beverage Association, said similar discrepancies exist along the state's other borders with Ohio, Michigan and Illinois.

Duane Ingle, who manages Al's at 325 E. 10th St., said Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve can bring in nearly triple the sales of an average day. Ingle had signs and banners posted throughout his store this week warning customers to buy their champagne early, but he predicted that some people will still procrastinate, then drive to Kentucky at the last minute.

"There's people that don't normally buy alcohol and just drink on New Year's," he said. "You're losing a lot of impulse sales."

Sunday liquor sales still aren't allowed in most parts of Kentucky, although eight local governments -- including Lexington and Frankfort -- have approved various exceptions for today.

No such exception was created for retailers in Indiana, although state Rep. Dave Crooks has prepared legislation for the upcoming session of the Indiana General Assembly that would allow Sunday liquor sales across the state from noon to 6 p.m.

Crooks, D-Washington, said Indiana's alcohol laws are hurting the state's tourism industry and leading Hoosiers to spend their money in neighboring states. Because customers can order drinks at a tavern or bar on Sunday, he said they should also be allowed to pick up a six-pack of beer or a bottle of wine



Phyllis Stinson shopped Wednesday at Al's Cut Rate Liquors in Jeffersonville, Ind. (By Keith Williams, The Courier-Journal)

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and bring it home.

"I think we need to talk about this issue," Crooks said in an interview. "We're losing income because of this ancient law on our books."

Todd Antz, who owns Keg Liquors in Clarksville, Ind., predicted he will see a 25 percent to 30 percent decline in alcohol sales leading up to the New Year's holiday due to the Sunday closure. He said the drop-off will hurt even more because it comes just before his two slowest months of the year.

Not everyone agrees about the severity of the lost sales. At Party Mart, 4808 Brownsboro Road, owner Jerry Rogers said today will be a "monster day," but mostly due to people who live in Louisville. He predicted that a limited number of customers will come from Southern Indiana and from Kentucky counties such as Oldham, which is dry except for larger restaurants, and Bullitt, where retail liquor sales aren't allowed on Sunday.

Ron Knasel, manager of Bottles Unlimited in New Albany, said he lost a small amount of business on Christmas Eve due to Indiana's alcohol laws, and he expects to lose a little more today. But he said the store, at State and Elm streets, draws plenty of Louisville customers the other six days of the week because of its low prices, and Knasel said he didn't mind being closed.

"To me it's not worth it," he said. "You need that one day off a week guaranteed."

And with plenty of stores on both sides of the river, Jeffersonville resident Ashtanice Meziawu said the closures probably won't be a big deal for most people.

"Most people will either stock up, or head across the bridge," he said.

Reporter Alex Davis can be reached at (502) 582-4644.

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