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LOCAL

IN TODAY'S PAPER: MORE THAN **\$310** IN SAVINGS FROM MANUFACTURERS' COUPONS

# The Vindicator

\$1.25

## Residents to corner food stores: We're fed up

*Some residents believe cleansing markets of alcohol sales or shutting them down could deter crime in Youngstown.*

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Video and photo gallery at **Vindy.com**

**YOUNGSTOWN** — Some residents and city officials are putting neighborhood markets on notice: Clean up your acts or else.

The markets have long been associated with crime and other turbulence by some residents and officials.

An East Side homicide April 15 brought fresh scrutiny to the F&N

▶ **Ballot language** of Party Pantry liquor option on Tuesday's primary ballot. **A6**

▶ **A rundown** of 911 reports about Party Pantry. **A6**

Food Market on Shehy Street, while on the South Side, a ballot issue in Tuesday's election has sparked feuds between Idora neighborhood residents and the Party Pantry at the corner of Glenwood Avenue and Canfield Road.

Residents want to see cleaner stores that carry quality products and that don't allow loitering or serve alcohol to minors, said Councilman Paul Drennen, D-5th.

"All the corner stores need to know is that resi-

*See Stores on Page A6*



The Vindicator/Lisa-Ann Ishihara

**CENTER OF DEBATE:** A ballot issue in Tuesday's election has sparked feuds between Idora neighborhood residents and the Party Pantry at the corner of Glenwood Avenue and Canfield Road in Youngstown.



The Vindicator/Lisa-Ann Ishihara

**SPEAKING OUT:** Frank Elling says he has experienced retaliation for his work promoting residents to vote "No" on Tuesday for the sale of alcohol at the Party Pantry.

## STORES

Continued From A1

dents are fed up with conditions and they're doing something about it," Drennen said.

After the April 15 shooting, Mayor Jay Williams and Police Chief Jimmy Hughes set their focus on the F&N Market, threatening to start actions to close the store in the crime-ridden neighborhood.

"We're still looking at the history involving that store," said Williams. "There is a need to have retail offerings in the city, but for too long, too many [stores] have operated in a way not respectable to citizens and the community."

### The Party's Over?

Last year, the Idora Neighborhood Association, a South Side block watch, and the Mahoning Valley Organizing Collaborative, a grass-roots community group dedicated to improving the quality of life in urban neighborhoods, began a corner-store campaign to clean up five markets on the South Side. The neighborhood block watch started the campaign to work toward a dry precinct.

The owners of Big A on Glenwood Avenue have been receptive to the campaign, but owners of the Party Pantry do not attend meetings hosted by the residents and community organizers, said James London, Idora Neighborhood Association president.

Neighborhood complaints have

## PARTY PANTRY WATCH

Residents on the South Side want a dry precinct to try to limit violent and criminal activity at corner stores.

### 9-1-1 call log for 2009

**March 6:** Group of kids fighting and gun shots. Store employee said he was jumped and a male beat his head on the concrete.

**March 13:** Large crowds

**March 17:** Two males standing outside the store drinking.

**March 21:** Female fighting with workers because her 5-year-old son stole a bag of chips from the store and they took his bike from him. The bike was in pieces in front of the store after the incident, the caller said.

**April 18:** A resident who lives near the store wants the harassment to stop.

**April 23:** Several shots heard in the area.

### Police Reports

**March 21, 2009:** Officers were called to Party Pantry in reference to a fight in the parking lot. Officers confiscated a loaded, ready-to-fire, 9mm Glock handgun from the owner's son, Zaher Sarsour, who said he carries the weapon so the store doesn't get robbed. Sarsour does not have a concealed weapons license so officers took the weapon.

**March 6, 2009:** Fight at the Party Pantry where both parties involved pulled guns on each other. One of the suspects was Zaher Sarsour.

**Dec. 27, 2008:** Victim claimed that store owners were handing out counterfeit bills as change.

**Jan. 26, 2008:** Two customers of the Party Pantry got into an argument with store clerk. Upon leaving the business the two men were shot at by an employee who was leaning out the drive-up style window.

markets.

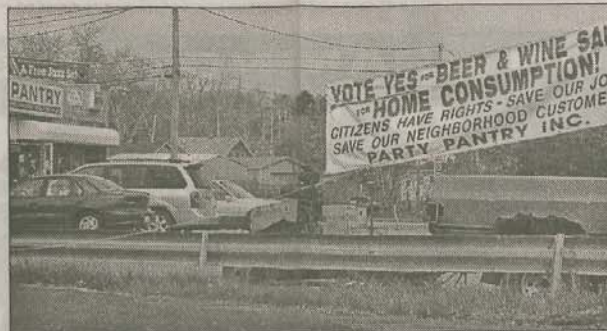
"They want to see business, but they'd rather see a vacant lot than have a business that facilitates crime," said Drennen, adding that some residents believe becoming a dry precinct is the start of cleaning up the neighborhood.

Tuesday, the Party Pantry will be on the ballot and residents can vote whether the sale of alcohol should be permitted at the store. In November, 60 percent of voters chose no. After the November election the store had so many days to reapply for a license. If voted down again, they won't have that luxury.

"A dry precinct is a very valid option that residents can and should consider," said the mayor.

More than 75 percent of crime is drug-related and the addition of alcohol and loitering escalates drug activity, he said.

Frank Elling, an advocate of the corner-store campaign, claimed he has experienced retaliation for his



**FOR THE ISSUE:** Tuesday, the Party Pantry will be on the ballot, and residents can vote whether the sale of alcohol should be permitted at the store, at Glenwood Avenue and Canfield Road.

vandalized, he said, adding that 15 windows have been damaged by chunks of cinder block thrown at his home.

"He [Frank] protested and they retaliated by knocking out his windows," said Joe Hardy, Idora Neighborhood Association member.

### Making a Living

Residents complain of the danger associated with loitering, drugs and alcohol and claim the Party Pantry facilitates dangerous activity.

There are always young men hanging outside the store, said Hardy.

"We have kids that go to that store," Hardy said, adding that some people have reported guns have been pulled on them and property has been stolen.

Zuhair and Ahlam Sarsour, husband and wife owners of Party Pantry, said there's no trouble at their store.

"We didn't do anything wrong, we're just trying to make a living," Ahlam said, noting the business supports their family.

Without the sale of alcohol, there will be no business, Zuhair added. "Ninety percent of our sales is alcohol. No alcohol, no one comes here," he said.

"We work hard here, it's not easy. People come in here and steal from you," Ahlam, said, adding that the business has all the necessary licenses, its taxes are paid and it does not serve minors.

The Sarsours have placed signs outside that say, "Vote yes for Beer and Wine Sale ... Save our jobs," while

across the street hang signs provided by the MVOC that say, "Clean Up Glenwood Ave. Vote No."

"I think it will help lower the crime and help stop the loitering," Hardy said of becoming a dry precinct.

### Targeting F&N Market

The mayor has worked with police and city Prosecutor Jay Macejko to close the F&N Food Market, possibly on nuisance violations.

Officials began taking a closer look after the shooting that killed a 32-year-old man April 15 outside the market.

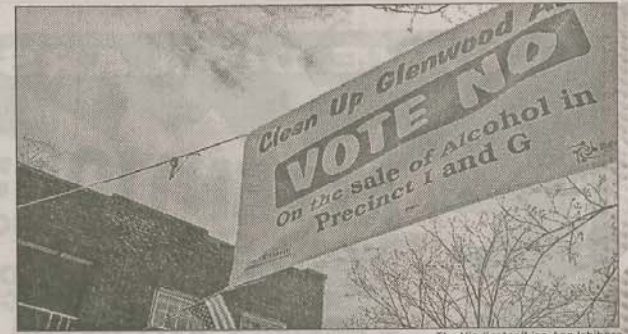
There were three other homicides near the market from 2000 to 2005, as well as nearly 80 calls to 911 since 2002 about the store. The callers reported a variety of criminal activity, including gunfire, drug activity and fights.

"We're still exploring all possibilities," Macejko said. "I don't dispute that the owner has been the victim sometimes, but we have to take into consideration the crime, especially the four homicides."

There still haven't been any arrests in the April 15 shooting, Macejko said.

The store owner argues that the criminal activity happens in the vacant lot next to the store.

"I can't tell them to move; it's city



The Vindicator/Lisa-Ann Ishihara

**AGAINST THE ISSUE:** Idora Neighborhood Association member Frank Elling has placed this sign outside of his Youngstown residence, urging neighborhood voters to "clean up Glenwood Avenue" and stop the sale of alcohol

## LOCAL OPTION

The results of the November 2008 election showed that about 60 percent of voters chose "no" for this issue.

### Ballot Language

Youngstown Ward 5 Precinct 1

Shall the sale of beer, wine and mixed beverages be permitted by Party Pantry, Inc., dba Party Pantry a holder of a C-2 and C-2X carryout liquor permit which authorizes off premise sales of beer, wine and mixed beverages who is engaged in the business of convenience store at 2732 Glenwood Ave., Youngstown, OH 44511 in this precinct?

SOURCE: The Mahoning Valley Organizing Collaborative



Williams