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With the help of Lynn Pomeroy, left, owner of Pomeroy's Bar & Liquors on Route 113 in Selbyville, security guard Rochelle Rayne shows how he and his co-workers scan customers for weapons before they enter the establishment.

Fight reports 'blown out of proportion'

Owner claims Selbyville town officials targeting his bar

By **Jon Bleiweis**
Staff Writer

SELBYVILLE — Pomeroy's Bar and Liquors has had its fair share of altercations, but when a new crowd started frequenting the business about a year ago, owner Lynn Pomeroy said his establishment suddenly attracted the attention of law enforcement agents around the county.

"I don't want to get into specifics and say it was racially motivated, but when a crowd was here and it was Caucasian, I don't think you could find a police report," he said. "Since it's been an all African-American crowd, every little thing is reported and it gets sensationalized."

Selbyville police say there

have been several fights at the Route 113 bar, the latest of which occurred on Christmas Eve. Reports indicate there were nearly 100 people involved and one man was hospitalized. Selbyville police were assisted by officers from the Delaware State Police, Bethany Beach, Fenwick Island, Millsboro and Ocean View.

Pomeroy says 90 percent of his customers at night are black. While he doesn't blame the fights on a particular race, he believes the change in entertainment is partly responsible for the ruckus. The restaurant used to host live bands, but it recently switched to a disc jockey.

He blames the town for

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the police attention, saying officials want the crowd to change. He believes a recently proposed ordinance that aims to prevent the sale of alcohol after 11 p.m. targets his establishment.

"It seems like the town is making an issue of it ever since the African-Americans made this a spot to play," he said. "Nobody said a peep about it until (they) started patronizing us heavily. It's been blown out of proportion."

In response to the fights, Pomeroy's has made a number of security enhancements, partially at the request of town officials.

There's a ban on heavy coats, hoodies, gang signs and gang colors; all customers must walk through a metal detector before entering the restaurant; and security guards have two-way radios to make owners aware of problems before they start.

"We've done that ever since the police requested we do it," Pomeroy said. "We've had a couple altercations, which we'd had in the past, but we've never been requested to do anything before."

Police Chief W. Scott Collins said his department has had to deal with multiple fights at Pomeroy's "off and on for the past year."

"It had slowed up quite a bit over the last few months, but we had two in the last month," he said.

As recently as last fall, altercations were "almost a weekly occurrence," Collins said. It was so bad at one time that police met with the restaurant owners and their attorney to discuss security staffing and loitering.

"They've done a good job of policing their own issues, which was nice," Collins said.

Mayor Clifton Murray said the restaurant is getting a bad reputation, and he simply wants the owners to put the safety of residents first.

"It's a matter of time before somebody gets seriously hurt," he said. "That's what we want to avoid."

A story told two ways

Pomeroy said part of the problem is that the police are disseminating false information. He claims the Christmas Eve fight involved three people, not 100 as reported by police.

"When people try to pull their friends apart, it looks like they're

all conglomerating together, but it wasn't like that," he said. "It was centralized in that one place right there."

The report states that Pomeroy sprayed the entire bar area with pepper spray to force everyone out of the building.

"That is a blatant lie," he said. "I never at any time, ever, had any kind of pepper spray in my hand, nor did I spray anybody. It was only sprayed in there by the head of security directly on the disorderly people, never throughout the whole building."

Pomeroy said the fight got out of hand because his staff of seven security guards quit minutes prior to the incident. He said they became upset because he asked them to kick out three people who were smoking at the bar.

"They quit five minutes before closing," he said. "They were going to show me who was running what."

Pomeroy said his head of security unleashed the pepper spray as the fight broke out.

"I witnessed it with my own two eyes," Pomeroy said. "I did not do it, nor did I sanction it."

The man who was transported to the hospital was not a customer, rather one of the security guards

know when the Town Council will vote on the proposal.

"I can't tell you when they're going to bring it up, but it's not an issue that's going away," he said. "The late-night stuff is the issue, that's what concerns us. I think they've been going on for some time."

Selbyville resident Laura Grimes said she thinks it's "ridiculous" to restrict the sale of alcohol because of a few people.

"I really don't think an hour or two one way or the other should make much of a difference," she said.

Saralee Stevens, who has lived in Selbyville her entire life, said while she thinks it's acceptable for people to have a drink with dinner, she doesn't think the town needs to have a nightclub environment.

Pomeroy said he believes the ordinance targets his restaurant. Regardless, he said he will continue to do his best to provide a safe environment for patrons, just as his family has done since the restaurant opened in 1924.

"I think they're going to try to force us, one way or another, to stop doing what we're doing," he said.

Dickerson and Jay Murray refused to comment.

Since the incident, Pomeroy said a different security crew has been hired.

The violent behavior in Selbyville has prompted the Town Council to take action. In the coming months, officials could prevent the sale of alcoholic beverages in town restaurants after 11 p.m. and consumption after 11:30 p.m.

"We're just trying to prevent anything from happening that we've had problems with in the past," Jay Murray said at a Dec. 5 Town Council meeting. "It just seems that after midnight there are some activities that go on that aren't conducive to what the town would like to have."

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