



**Paul
Harasim**

Miller brewing fight over shirts

IF A T-SHIRT bears the inscriptions "Killer Lite Beer" and "We're Pushing a Drug" and lists alcohol-related diseases including cirrhosis, alcoholic hepatitis, fetal alcohol syndrome and pancreatitis, would you assume the shirt — showing a man throwing up — is being sold on behalf of the Miller Brewing Co.?

If you had one beer too many, maybe.

Yet, the Miller Brewing Co. — which worked hard to make sure people wouldn't have one too many at its Labor Day weekend bash at the Astrodome — claims in a recent lawsuit against Doctors Ought To Care (DOC) and its founder, Houston physician Alan Blum, that concertgoers were so confused by the T-shirts that Miller lost precious royalties on T-shirts reading "Miller Lite Beer" and "We're Having A Party."

"This is the kind of mindset people have when there's too much alcohol in them," Blum cracked.

ACLU steps in

If Miller and parent company Philip Morris — best known for cigarettes — thought Blum would be intimidated by the suit, they were obviously wrong.

"Philip Morris is always the first to cry in its beer when it's satirized," Blum said, laughing.

The American Civil Liberties Union has decided to defend Blum and DOC.

"This lawsuit has significant free-speech implications," said Bruce Griffiths, the staff attorney for the Houston chapter of the ACLU. "This lawsuit can't have any purpose other than to try and shut up Dr. Blum and DOC. It's ludicrous to say that the 35 T-shirts they sold was serious competition to Miller. They just don't like the message he's sending."

Even if you drink beer occasionally, as Blum himself does, you can't help but appreciate the message Blum is trying to get out to young people through humor: Alcohol is a legal drug

that can have serious consequences.

Counterpoint ads

And shouldn't dedicated health professionals question, as DOC did, the wisdom of the Texas Special Olympics affiliating itself with a brewery for the Labor Day party when alcohol abuse leads to fetal alcohol syndrome?

Isn't it refreshing that there are doctors — DOC boasts 5,000 members nationwide — who concentrate more on preventing disease than picking up hefty fees for treating it?

DOC already is legendary in the smoking control movement.

The group brought back counter-advertising against tobacco ads. Instead of "I-smoke-for-taste" ads, DOC made "I-smoke-for-smell" ads featuring a macho man with a cigarette up his nose. DOC runs ads for Emphysema Slims instead of Virginia Slims.

"The way to get kids to do something is to tell them it's dangerous," Blum said. "But if you can get them to see how stupid and childish something is through ads, they'll laugh the pushers out of town."

Blum's chances good

Ex-Surgeon General C. Everett Koop honored Blum's work by giving him the Surgeon General's Medallion.

Though Miller beer spokesman Steve Forsyth insists the suit against Blum was brought only because of supposed confusion between their T-shirts, Glen Aukerman, president elect of the American Academy of Family Physicians, doubts it.

"I think this may be their (Philip Morris') response to the recent decision to ban smoking on airlines." A recent U.S. Appeals Court decision regarding Spy Magazine's parody of Cliff Notes — the long-established study guide to the classics — indicates Blum has a good chance in court.

Though there are great similarities in the way the publications look, the court, noting the importance of freedom of expression, said readers are smart enough to tell the difference.

Dr. Sam Nixon, the president of the Harris County Medical Society, doesn't think Miller has handled it's situation with Blum very intelligently.

"Miller Lite, through this lawsuit, is giving Doctors Ought To Care a tremendous boost in publicity, thereby giving added attention and weight to message of Dr. Blum," Nixon said. The people who are peddling poisons . . . can't stand the obvious humorous aspects of social commentary on what they do . . ."