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| *July 15, 2005* | |

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**1. Fewer Minor UI Students Charged With Drinking**

By Jim Butts *— The Daily Iowan*

[July 15, 2005](http://www.dailyiowan.com/main.cfm/include/displayIssueArticles/issue_date/20050715.html)

The number of students charged with underage drinking dropped by close to 50 percent over the past academic year, according to a UI report made public Tuesday.  
  
The Office of Student Services released its yearly report compiling charges against university students filed by Iowa City police and the UI police between August 2004 and May.  
  
In the 2004-05 academic year, police charged approximately 780 students with underage drinking, down from around 1,470 from the year before. The number was the lowest since the 1999-2000 school year, when police charged approximately 720 underage students with drinking.

However, while the underage-drinking numbers were lower, the UI saw approximately 50 more arrests for public intoxication, up 10 percent from the previous school year. The majority of other student offenses - ranging from assault to drug dealing - remained relatively consistent from the 2003-04 school year.

Phillip Jones, the vice president for Student Services, released the summary of crime statistics to Iowa City police earlier this month. In his July 1 letter to the Iowa City police chief, Jones noted that city police made 73 percent of all student arrests.

"That the vast majority of the alcohol-related charges filed against students took place on non-university property demonstrates the continuing importance of the Stepping Up Coalition," Jones wrote.

Tom Baker, the associate dean of students, said the drop in the number of underage drinking charges was significant, but he didn't know if the reduction was a change in underage student drinking patterns or fewer bar checks done by the police.

Lynn Walding, the administrator for the Iowa Alcoholic Beverages Division, said early this month that the number of violations for bars serving underage drinkers has also gone down over the past year. He was unsure if the fewer number of citations meant a changing drinking pattern among UI students under 21 or a change in police enforcement.

No one from the Iowa City police could be reached for comment Thursday afternoon.



**2. Vandals Invade Vineyard**

By Emily Block, *Telegraph Herald*

July 12, 2005

**Family ponders motive after more than 200 plants are severed at Stone Creek Winery**

Returning home to a vineyard where scores of grapevines had been slashed, the owners of the Durango, Iowa, winery are convinced the vandalism wasn’t the handiwork of “just a passing vandal.”

But Bob and Nan Smith, who own Stone Cliff Winery, don’t know whose work it is.

The vandal or vandals probably arrived at the family-owned business along U.S. 52 North sometime overnight between June 30 and July 1, using pruners to cut away at between 200 and 300 vines in the heart of the 8-year-0ld vineyard, Bob Smith said.

Damage to the vines, which were among some 6,000 the family of four has planted, was estimated at $10,000. Both bases of all 200 to 300 vines were cut, ensuring that the growth and existing grapes on each vine would die. Because it takes five to six years for grapevines to reach full production, those destroyed will be out of commission for several years, Bob Smith said.

“I’m concerned that an individual or individuals that have such malicious feelings for us were on our property for a period of time, and we don’t know who they are,” Bob Smith said.

The winery is offering a $5,000 cash reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible for the destruction.

“I’m hopeful that the reward will loosen some lips,” Bob Smith said.

The destruction went unnoticed for a week because the Smiths left early July 1 for a family vacation and did not return until Friday night. Bob Smith found the dead vines, along with three smashed-out windows in his family’s antique pickup truck, Saturday morning.

He said the crime probably took at least one to two hours to complete.

“We’re confident that it wasn’t just a passing vandal since they took an extended period of time to cut the vines,” Bob Smith said.

He can only speculate on a motive, questioning whether the responsible offenders are upset about the recent approval of new zoning, which will allow the business to build a new winery along the highway. The existing winery is located near the family’s house, about a mile off the highway.

The Dubuque County Sheriff’s Department, which is investigating the incident, has no suspects, but believes more than one person was involved.

“We don’t have any leads to go on right now,” Sgt. Harley Pothoff said. “All of the neighbors have been interviewed, and we’ve come up with no information to follow up on.”

An interview with the winery’s delivery man, however, led to the probable time frame when the vandalism occurred. The delivery man reported seeing broken glass from the antique truck, used to support a billboard promoting events at the winery, when he arrived there July 1 after the Smith family had already left.

Bob and Nan Smith and their two daughters moved to the Dubuque area seven years ago after planting their first grapevines a year earlier. This is the first time their vineyard has been targeted with vandalism.

“We’ll have to wait and see which vines will survive. There’s really nothing we can do until next spring when we will either replace them with new plants or nurse them back to health,” Bob Smith said.



**3. Strange Brews**

***The Wall Street Journal*, Page W1**

**July 8, 2005**

**Two parts vodka, one part octopus? To boost sales, bars and liquor companies are pushing weird cocktails. Nancy Keates on the effort to keep spirits up -- and why your martini tastes like bubblegum.**

Bogart's American Grill in Raleigh, N.C., is a joint much like you'd find across the U.S., with rib-eye steaks on the menu, Marilyn Monroe photos on the walls and a drink list of merlot, Miller beer and the kind of dry martinis Humphrey Bogart himself might have sipped. And then there's the newest house cocktail -- a shot of vodka soaked for days with hunks of Bubblicious bubble gum.

"It tastes just like the gum," says manager Mary Shipley, who created that drink and another made of vodka soaked with Jolly Rancher green-apple and watermelon candies. Bogart's sells more than three gallons of the new concoctions every week.

With bars and restaurants around the country coming up with unusual drinks to help them stand out, see a sampling of some of the stranger cocktails we found, with some sampling notes:

Now that Americans have been through Cosmopolitans, apple martinis and caipirinhas, what's next: ginger Cosmopolitans, cucumber-apple martinis and carrot caipirinhas? Actually, yes -- those combinations and even weirder ones are popping up on menus across the country. After two years of strong liquor-sales growth, the spirits industry want to keep the party going by making customers feel like they have to try the next new thing. Meanwhile, bars and restaurants, squeezed by higher wholesale food prices, are using attention-grabbing, pricey drinks to keep bar revenues high.

The bar at Ken Stewart's Grille in Akron, Ohio, serves a $10 martini with a pickled baby octopus draped over the side. In Kirkland, Wash., Jager Bar & Restaurant recently added a cocktail of cucumber, sake and vodka topped with lumps of wasabi and seared sushi tuna. The national chain Morton's is considering rolling out a new "Jameson and ginger" drink promoted by the whiskey's maker, the French conglomerate Pernod Ricard. And this season, Marriott sent out recipes to 320 hotels that included a new mojito that uses basil instead of mint.

With so many cocktails out there already, it's pretty tough to break new ground and come up with something that tastes good. Many bartenders lack the training to develop drinks with the proper balance between bitter and sweet, in part because most bartending schools -- unlike cooking academies -- can't encourage students to taste drinks as they make them. For reasons of liability and cost, these schools don't use actual liquor: Students make hundreds of drinks in a typical 40-hour course, so they often practice with colored water and dishwashing soap.

Meanwhile, bartenders are being asked by managers to follow constantly morphing directions. The Sweetwater Restaurant and Martini Bar in Naperville, Ill., has about 50 different kinds of martinis on its bar menu, and the list changes every three months. "It can absolutely be overwhelming," says bartender George Gellis. The martini menu at Lola's in Los Angeles carries this warning: "Martinis are not returnable! All ingredients are listed. Please order accordingly."

On a recent evening at Vault Martini Bar in Portland, Ore., customer Ann Samiee had to negotiate a cocktail menu with almost 100 choices that included a Badhattan, with bourbon and red wine, and a Pad Thai, a drink made of ginger-infused vodka, basil, lemongrass and lime juice. Ms. Samiee settled on a "Blue Basil," a mixture of vodka, vermouth and basil, plus olives stuffed with blue cheese that created an oil slick on top. "I felt like it should have had croutons," says the stay-at-home mom. Across the bar, flight attendant Jenni Tompkins ordered a "Cherry Cheesecake" with vodka, vanilla liqueur and cranberry juice. Her verdict: "It tastes like cough syrup." The manager, Kenny Stachovich, swapped it for a different drink but says the Cherry Cheesecake is very popular. "People get bored with rum and Cokes," he says.

The $49 billion U.S. spirits industry is banking on that. Spirits consumption has grown for the past seven years, and is forecast to jump another 4% this year, according to data from Adams Beverage Group. Much of the increase in sales has been fueled by new products. Spirits companies introduced 53 flavored vodkas and 26 flavored rums in the past two years, up from 17 and 12 respectively in 2002, according to the Distilled Spirits Council in Washington.

**Sending Out a Team**

To market all of these products, liquor companies need to think up new ways to get them onto bar menus. Four months ago, Pernod Ricard for the first time hired an outside mixologist -- the industry's name for someone who comes up with new cocktails -- to create five drink recipes for each of the company's top 10 brands. The consultant, David Commer, who worked for six years as director of beverage marketing at TGI Friday's, developed the "Jameson and ginger," which uses fresh ginger syrup instead of ginger ale, and an "Irish margarita" using Jameson instead of tequila, among others. Pernod Ricard sent out a team to bring the recipes to bars and restaurants. "We work to help them create drinks more people will buy," says Scott Moore, director of Pernod Ricard's U.S. accounts.

Some of the unusual concoctions at the Jager Bar in Kirkland, Wash.

Exotic cocktails are also a way for smaller companies to get noticed. Triple 8 vodka, made by Cisco Brewers in Nantucket, Mass., pays for a three-day weekend on the island for bartenders and managers who sell a certain quota. Now, Triple 8 shows up on menus across the Northeast, in cocktails such as the $15 "The Man from Nantucket" at the Biltmore Room in New York, a Triple 8 martini with garlic-stuffed black olives, and the "Nantucket Bloody Mary" (garnished with roasted tomato-stuffed olives) at Spire restaurant in Boston.

For bars and restaurants, hodgepodge cocktails -- even if their ingredients cost more -- can bolster margins by attracting attention. The establishments also can charge more for the new drinks. Farnoush Deylamian, manager at Aziza in San Francisco, estimates that cocktails with fresh vegetables or fruit cost about $2 more and are priced accordingly. But the drinks -- such as the $9 "Balsamic Morocco Mary" and "Kumquat Blossom" -- have been featured in local media and lured more customers. Three years ago, the restaurant didn't have a separate cocktail menu and served mostly the basics.

Ludger Szmania, who owns the Jager restaurant in Washington, says he offsets the extra cost of the ingredients by using standard vodkas that cost less than premium brands. Faced with a lagging bar a year ago, Mr. Szmania paid a mixologist to create a new menu. When Mr. Szmania first tasted the "Hunter" (horseradish-infused vodka with Grand Marnier, garnished with a grilled beef tenderloin tip), he thought the idea was a little crazy. Now that the new drinks have brought in new customers and tripled bar revenues, he's asked his bartenders to arrive at 2 p.m. and do prep work so that by the time the bar opens they have a whole array of ingredients set up. "It gives people something to talk about," says Mr. Szmania.

**Higher Margins**

Bar margins have become more important to restaurants squeezed by rising food prices. Wholesale food prices rose about 5% per year in 2003 and 2004, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, but restaurant menu prices rose at about half that rate, according to the National Restaurant Association. Cocktails can be sold at a higher margin than food: The ingredients in a cocktail typically cost a restaurant 20% of the drink's final cost, while a typical food item costs 30% of the menu cost, according to Chicago food consulting company Technomic.

Cocktail consumption has fluctuated over the years. The first known printed reference to the term "cocktail," was in 1806 in The Balance and Columbian Repository, a newspaper in Hudson, N.Y., according to the Museum of the American Cocktail in New Orleans. (The newspaper's definition: "a stimulating liquor composed of spirits of any kind, sugar, water and bitters.") In the 1980s, spirits consumption fell off in part because of concerns raised by Mothers Against Drunk Driving; as a result, lower-alcohol substitutes such as beer and wine coolers took off, and it was hard to find a cocktail menu at any restaurant or bar.

**The mixmaster at work at Employees Only in New York**

Then, in the mid-'90s, Madonna was photographed at New York's Rainbow Room drinking a Cosmopolitan. Bartender Dale DeGroff was inundated with requests for the recipe. (Mr. DeGroff says he didn't invent the drink, but believes it was adapted from an old recipe called the Harpoon: cranberry juice, vodka, lime and simple syrup.) In 1997, Absolut began distributing recipes for Cosmopolitans that called for its Absolut Citron vodka. Mr. DeGroff became a consultant to Absolut and also designed drinks for the lead characters in the TV series "Sex in the City," which further propelled the drink to fame. Restaurants and liquor companies raced to come up with new star drinks. They borrowed the caipirinha from Brazil (made of sugarcane liquor, sugar and lime), and invented combinations like the apple martini, which many mixologists say originated at Lola's in Los Angeles. Food flavors led to actual food, and a few cutting-edge bars began putting oddball edibles in drinks.

Now that the trend has gone nationwide, it's creating a bit of a backlash among some purists. "I cringe when people call anything in a martini glass a martini," says Robert Hess, who along with some other stalwarts started the Museum of the American Cocktail. Its bar will soon serve only "authentic" drinks, made from 19th-century recipes. Audrey Saunders, a well-known mixologist, refuses to use recipes from liquor brands. When Ms. Saunders opens her new bar Pegu Club in New York this August, she'll be making the same gin-based drink served at the famed British officer's club in Rangoon in the 1900s.

Some cutting-edge bars and restaurants -- such as Bar Americain, a new Bobby Flay restaurant in Midtown Manhattan -- also are shunning the more-is-better take on drinks and paring menus down to include only classics like sazeracs. Employees Only, a bar in New York, is making its own vermouths, bitters and infusions from preprohibition recipes.

Lynn Fischer, an online marketing executive, was sitting at the bar of a Chinese restaurant in New York recently when the bartender asked if she'd like to try a vodka from Minnesota shaken with green-tea powder and a dash of sugar syrup, served in a martini glass and garnished with a wedge of cucumber. Ms. Fischer thought about it -- then ordered a margarita. "It seemed a little too strange," she says. "I just wanted a margarita."





CHRISTOPHER GANNON/THE REGISTER

In trouble: A city councilman wants to declare Club Cancun, 900 E. Army Post Road, a nuisance after a homicide last weekend.

**4, Brooks Wants Club Declared a Nuisance**

By [Abby Simons, Staff Writer –](mailto:asimons@dmreg.com?subject=Brooks%20wants%20club%20declared%20a%20nuisance) *[Des Moines Register](mailto:asimons@dmreg.com?subject=Brooks%20wants%20club%20declared%20a%20nuisance)*

July 12, 2005

**A homicide took place at Club Cancun on Army Post Road over the weekend, bringing the official's scrutiny.**

A series of shootings outside a south-side nightclub has put the establishment's liquor license in the cross hairs of Des Moines police and a city leader.

City Councilman Archie Brooks said Monday he wants Club Cancun, 900 E. Army Post Road, to be declared a nuisance under a 1998 ordinance that allows the city, in the name of public safety, some control over businesses.

Anthony Langford Jr., 26, of Des Moines was shot to death and three other men were wounded outside Club Cancun early Friday. Police said gun violence has broken out in that general area four times in the past 17 months.

Neighbors say the situation has become dangerous. Nearby business owners called for action last week.

"It's a continuing problem of alcohol, fights, shootings, police cars in the area, and it doesn't help other businesses or the people who live behind" Club Cancun, Brooks said. "Even if you live within three or four blocks, it still affects you. We accept diversity, but it's not the type of managers and type of business that we want in the south side at this time."

From Dec. 3 to the night Langford was killed, police made 113 trips to Club Cancun. Six of those trips were on reports of shots fired - two turned out to be homicides - and nine others were to break up fights.

Brooks, who represents the city's southeast side, said he plans to set a July 25 hearing to discuss the nightclub's liquor license. Club Cancun, formerly Coyote's, opened in September 2003 under owner Kurt Just, who said he spent $150,000 to renovate the 10,000-square-foot club. Liquor license records show the club is now owned by La Cueva Corp., a partnership between Ulises Rios of Pleasant Hill and Olivia Perez of Des Moines.

No one could be reached at a telephone number provided for La Cueva Corp., and a message left at Club Cancun was not returned Monday.

Police can recommend that the club's liquor license be revoked.

Vice and narcotics officer Matt Harkin said that because establishments with liquor licenses are governed by the state's alcoholic beverages division, police and the city don't have the authority to close them.

The nuisance ordinance, though, allows city leaders to limit business hours. Of businesses that have run afoul of the ordinance - one had no liquor license - only the Hickman Pub, 2335 Hickman Road, remains open. The rest have voluntarily closed.

"We want people to be safe and live in neighborhoods that are nuisance-free, and that is what the ordinance is designed for," Harkin said. "All we want to do is have businesses within the law, and if that doesn't happen, we will consider every option."

Club Cancun remained open last weekend and has advertised an upcoming weekend event.

Brooks said Club Cancun owners have had enough chances to remedy the problems, and he continues to receive complaints regularly.

"People say it's a different group, it's cultural, so let's work with them. But pretty soon that wears thin with the residents and with me," Brooks said. "It's time to make them accountable, because we wouldn't put up with it with most businesses throughout the city.

"I can't tell the neighbors anymore, 'Let's give them another chance.' They've proven they can't control the crowd and the clientele, and part of owning a liquor license is your responsibility for your clientele and what takes place outside your building."



**5. Beer as a Mixer?**

By Sadie Jo Smokey,*The Arizona Republic*  
July 13, 2005

For a generation that likes flavored vodkas and rums, mixing cocktails with beer is the next likely step.

Anheuser-Busch recently published a promotional booklet for bartenders of 24 drink concoctions that pair beer with such ingredients as strawberry daiquiri mix, vanilla vodka, blue curaçao, crème de menthe and Jagermeister. Not all in the same drink, of course.

The booklets, featuring Anheuser-Busch brands such as Bud Light, BE (caffeinated beer), Michelob, Bacardi Silver and Bistro, have been sent to bartenders around the country.



**6. U.S. Lags Others on DWI Toughness**

By John Valenti - *Newsday*

July 13, 2005

If you go to a party in Sweden, it's perfectly acceptable to drink. But you'd better not drive -- not even after one beer.

The standard for drunken driving in Sweden is .02 percent blood alcohol concentration -- the equivalent of one 12-ounce beer, one 1.5-ounce shot of hard liquor or one 5-ounce glass of wine in one hour.

It is a standard far stricter than ours of .08 percent.

And in Japan, where the standard is .03 percent blood-alcohol content -- but zero tolerance in the practical sense -- a driver can be arrested and charged with DWI after having just a few sips of alcohol.

"A sip of beer, a sip of wine," said Tamotsu Ide, a former Japanese police captain and Chief of Security for the Consulate General of Japan in New York. "It's almost impossible to drive after even that much. ... Any drink, you will get caught."

Despite great strides in awareness, education and enforcement in the last two decades, the United States still has one of the most lenient drunken-driving standards in the world, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

But, in the wake of a horrific crash like the one recently on the Meadowbrook Parkway, where police said a wrong-way drunken driver killed a limousine driver and a 7-year-old flower girl, experts said we can learn a lot from how other countries combat drunk driving.

"We're at a much lower level [of DWI offenses] than we were 20 years ago," said Kathryn Stewart, chairwoman of the National Academy of Sciences Committee on Alcohol, Other Drugs and Transportation and the author of a NHTSA study on DWI laws in other countries. "But we still have one of the highest BAC [blood alcohol content] limits in the world."

A significant number of countries have a DWI standard of .05 percent blood-alcohol content, including Australia and at least 10 European nations.

The standard is even less in China and Norway. It is absolutely zero in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

"It's so widely accepted that it is a serious crime to drive under the influence that people don't," said Amelie Heinsjo, spokeswoman for the Consulate General of Sweden in New York. "If you have a drink and try to drive, people will raise an eyebrow."

And, she said, there is a good chance you will be caught.

Many countries use random breath testing to enforce these tough standards. Police in Sweden and Australia, for instance, can stop any motorist anywhere at any time and make them submit to a breath test -- without probable cause. Police in this country cannot do that.

In her study, Stewart found that, in the Australian state of Victoria, where more than 2.4 million drivers are stopped for random breath tests annually, a first offense carries a maximum fine of 180,000 Australian dollars -- about $135,000 in American currency. The fear factor keeps most drivers from driving drunk.

A first offender in Belgium who registers more than .08 percent blood-alcohol content faces a fine of 400,000 Belgian francs -- about $12,000 -- and a second offense within three years can earn a fine of 1 million francs -- more than $30,000 -- with that fine doubled for yet another offense in three years.

Any wonder there was a 14-percent reduction in drunken-driving fatalities in Belgium in 1995, the year after it tightened its standard to .05 percent blood-alcohol content?

The Swedes use alkolas -- an ignition interlock system -- to prevent drunken driving by convicted offenders.

These methods work, Stewart said. And Stewart found drivers often do not mind the intrusions. For instance, drivers in Finland actually favor a legal limit of zero.

They don't want drunken drivers on their roads.

"It's certainly been found," Stewart said, "that when countries lower their limits there are fewer crashes ... Everybody drinks and drives less."



**7. A Different Drinking Problem**

*The Sentinel*

July 10, 2005

Not every new idea is necessarily a step forward.

Consider the beer business. Every time sales of beer flatten out, somebody thinks of a new trick to keep the breweries brewing at capacity.

When diet crazes made people think twice about reaching for a mug, the brewers responded with "light" beer. To keep people interested in the popular brand names when a craze developed for imports and private breweries, they came up with "ice" beer.

When younger drinkers began to develop a greater interest in cocktails, the breweries came up with "malternatives" — drinks that are similar to beer but taste like lemon, lime or even raspberry. There are even new brews on the market that add caffeine to the alcohol in response to the popular objection that a couple of beers tend to make people drowsy.

But all of this is fiddling around the edges compared to a new concoction that a German brewer has come up with — nicotine beer.

The manufacturer is billing this as "the world's first smoking-cessation beer," no doubt intended to help smokers deal with the increasing number of taverns and restaurants that ban smoking, both here and in Europe. The new brew, called "NicoShot," can duplicate a full pack of cigarettes in just three cans, according to the manufacturer.

Nicotine and alcohol aren't regulated substances in America, so it's unlikely nicotine beer will be subjected to the rigors of FDA testing when it arrives here. But by applying a bit of common sense and a wealth of public domain information and experience to this new product, we think we can make a few predictions.

For example, any claim nicotine beer might have as a smoking cessation measure is probably overblown. People who use nicotine substitutes to wean them off cigarettes are typically directed to reduce their dosage over time. It's unlikely such an instruction will appear on the label of a bottle of NicoShot.

More likely, smokers who drink it will simply revert to tobacco once they're away from a non-smoking environment. Non-smokers who drink it, conversely, might be more likely to start smoking, since they'll have developed a taste for nicotine.

Worst of all, alcohol is already known to create a dependency among frequent users all by itself. There is some scientific dispute as to whether alcohol addiction is physiological or psychological in nature, but there is no such debate about nicotine — it's one of the most addictive substances known to man.

To us, that indicates a possibility that nicotine beer might actually increase alcoholism. We'd definitely recommend a skeptical response if you're offered a taste of this strange brew.



**8. West Palm Rum Maker Rides High on Potential Buy**

*Palm Beach Post*

July 14, 2005

Life is sweet these days for rum maker Cruzan International Inc.

The West Palm Beach-based company's stock (Amex: RUM, $28.11) is up nearly 100 percent since the owner of Absolut Vodka acquired a 67.8 percent stake in Cruzan June 3. Last week, Stockholm-based V&S Vin and Spirit AB said it wanted to buy the rest of Cruzan, too.

Although Cruzan officials said they still are reviewing the $28.37-a-share offer, industry analysts said they expect the deal to be approved. It would allow Cruzan to continue to reap the benefits of a growing rum market in the United States and abroad, they said.

"When these kind of deals take place, normally we see a rush forward to make certain that the brand is going to do very well," said Tom Pirko, president of BevMark LLC, a beverage consulting firm in Santa Barbara, Calif. "They're going to hit the gas pedal. If it was going at 65, it's going to hit 80, 90."

Cruzan Chairman and CEO Jay Maltby said Cruzan had been looking for a partner to expand the distribution of its namesake rum. V&S, which the Swedish government owns, had $1.4 billion in sales last year, compared with Cruzan's $96 million.

"They have more resources in both trade distribution and financially, which will enable us to expand our marketing efforts domestically and internationally," said Maltby, adding that Cruzan's 25 employees in West Palm Beach, who work in administration, sales and marketing, should not lose their jobs.

V&S hopes to complete the deal, which values Cruzan at about $250 million, including debt and options, by the end of September, Maltby said.

Cruzan is the fourth-largest rum manufacturer by volume in the United States with a 2.7 percent share, according to Adams Liquor Handbook, an industry publication. That's far behind the leading rum, Bacardi, which holds nearly half the market for rum in the U.S.

But Maltby said Cruzan had managed to compete against larger rum manufacturers because it had specialized in flavored and super-premium rums.

"Most of the rum companies try to be a 'me, too' to Bacardi by working on light rum or dark rum, and we decided to go around them," he said.

The approach appears to be working.

Volume of the company's rums, which are distilled in the Virgin Islands and bottled mostly in two plants in Auburndale and Lake Alfred, jumped 18 percent last year, from 599,000 cases in 2003 to 708,000 cases in 2004.

"It's on a good track to continue that growth," said Irwin Michael, portfolio manager at Toronto-based ABC Funds, which owns more than 150,000 shares of Cruzan and supports V&S's offer.

In order to focus on the Cruzan rum brand, the company changed its name in April from Todhunter International. Cruzan also makes cooking wine, vinegar and bulk alcohol for other liquor manufacturers. But Maltby said that, for the past couple of years, the profits from those businesses had been invested in marketing the company's rum.

Analysts said it was not surprising that V&S wanted to acquire Cruzan, since V&S does not own any major rum brands.

V&S representatives in Stockholm referred questions this week to Karen Dewis, the company's Washington, D.C., attorney. Dewis declined to comment.

Cruzan has profited from a boom in the overall market for rum, particularly in the flavored rum segment. Rum volume in the United States jumped 6.1 percent last year to 20.6 million cases, up from 19.4 million cases in 2003, according to the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States. In 2003, flavored rums made up 39.5 percent of domestic rum sales, up from 35 percent in 2002.

Shawn Kelley, a spokeswoman for the council, said a new "cocktail culture" in the United States had paid off for Cruzan and other rum makers. Restaurants such as T.G.I. Friday's now sport signature cocktails, she said.

"The cocktail culture is not even a trend anymore," Kelley said. "It's here."

Pirko, the BevMark president, said the Cruzan-Absolut mix is a sign of resurgence in the liquor industry.

"It's a growth market," Pirko said. "It continues to pull away from beer. Rum in particular seems to be coming around."

