

County board member: 'It was my fault' for drunken driving arrest

Kepler says she hadn't eaten before consuming alcohol

Monday, February 2, 2009 10:27 AM EST

By Mitch Hotts, Macomb Daily Staff Writer

A newly elected Macomb County commissioner is taking "full responsibility" for her arrest on charges of drunken driving and leaving the scene of an accident over the weekend in Royal Oak.

Irene Kepler, a former member of the Roseville City Council, on Sunday afternoon acknowledged her run-in with police on Washington in downtown Royal Oak about 14 hours earlier that led to her arrest.

"I'm disappointed in myself," Kepler said when contacted at her home in Roseville. "I take full responsibility for what happened. It was my fault."

Royal Oak police declined to provide details of the incident until Kepler is formally arraigned in 44th District Court. It was not immediately clear when that would take place.

Kepler, 30, said has been dealing for years with an eating disorder and had recently undergone surgery for a procedure that resulted in a decrease in food consumption.

While out with friends in

Royal Oak on Saturday night, Kepler said she didn't have enough to eat before she consumed a vodka-and-soda drink. She said the alcohol hit her harder than she expected.

At some point, there was a minor accident but police would not discuss the case. Kepler said she stopped on Washington to make a call on her cell phone about 2 a.m. and that's when a patrol car pulled up and began an investigation.

After making the arrest, police then impounded her vehicle. She was later released from the police department Sunday afternoon.

Kepler said she receives counseling on her eating disorder from a therapist in Bloomfield Hills and hopes the therapist can assist her in dealing with the arrest.

State Sen. Mickey Switalski, D-Roseville, was saddened when learning of the incident from a reporter. Kepler had served an internship with his office and was named State of Michigan Legislative Intern of the Year.

"That sounds so out of character for her," Switalski said. "But everybody makes mistakes. I hope she takes heart and learns from this and is able to contribute again to public life."

Kepler was in her second term on the Roseville council when she resigned in 2006 to take a job in North Carolina.

She is currently working as an aide to state Rep. Harold Haugh, her former colleague on the Roseville council, and has worked as a social worker for Roseville Community Schools.

In November she was elected to a two-year term on the Macomb County Board of Commissioners where she earns a \$34,000 salary.

Kepler is the second elected official from Roseville to run into problems with the law in the past eight months. Judge Catherine Steenland of the 39th District Court is serving a 90-day unpaid suspension from her job after she was convicted of impaired driving in Ogemaw County.

County Commissioner intent on proving arrest was one-time incident

By April Lehmbeck
C & G Staff Writer

ROYAL OAK — Macomb County Commissioner Irene Kepler, D-Roseville, plans to walk a straight line in the future to show people she won't make the mistake of driving after drinking alcohol again.

The former Roseville City Council member who recently won a spot on the County Commission also hopes that people will look at her history of dedication to the community when they consider her alleged run-in with the law in the early morning hours of Feb. 1.



Irene Kepler

"I made extremely poor choices this past weekend and take responsibility for those choices," Kepler said. "I sincerely apologize to the residents of Roseville for any embarrassment this have may have caused.

"I will continue to work hard for you, regardless of this issue," she said. "I ask that you please judge me now on my reputation of being hard-working and dedicated to bettering my community and allow me the time to prove this was an isolated incident."

According to a police report that matches information from local media reports, police received a call from a resident in the area of Washington and Waverly concerning a crash in front of their home at about 2:15 a.m. Feb. 1 in Royal Oak.

The caller told police that the driver hit their parked vehicle and drove away from the crash north on Washington. The driver stopped at the corner, which is where officers found her when responding to the call. From there, they took the woman to the station and got a warrant to draw blood, according to the report.

However, the police report did not reveal the name of the suspect in the incident; that information was blacked out.

Though Kepler's name surfaced in stories that contained the same crash details earlier this week, police would not release details — such as the suspect's name — regarding the alleged incident when contacted by this reporter.

“We do not release any information on people arrested until they have been arraigned,” Lt. Corrigan O’Donohue said. “As of today, no one has been arraigned in the case you are referring to.”

Kepler said she went from a restaurant to a bar that evening.

“I actually was smart enough to only drink water through dinner,” she said. “Later, at a bar, someone bought me drink and I then proceeded to use very poor judgment.”

This is the second incidence of a public official from Roseville getting in trouble for drinking and driving. Last summer, 39th District Court Judge Catherine Steenland faced her own troubles for an incident that took place Up North.

Staff Writer Jeremy Carroll contributed to this report.

You can reach Staff Writer April Lehbeck at alehmbeck@candgnews.com or at (586) 498-1043.

 SHARE 

Update:

Commissioner sues state

<http://macombdaily.com/articles/2009/03/07/online/srv0000004853328.txt>

Published: Saturday, March 7, 2009

A Macomb County commissioner **is suing the state** to restore her driver's license following her recent arrest for drunk driving and leaving the scene of a traffic crash in Royal Oak.

Irene Kepler, D-Roseville, on Friday filed a petition asking Judge Peter J. Maceroni of Macomb County Circuit Court to overrule Secretary of State Terri Land and approve a restricted license that would allow her to drive to her job in Lansing as an aide to state Rep. Harold Haugh, D-Roseville, and for her elected post on the county board of commissioners.

She wants to be able to drive 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. weekdays, 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturdays and 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. Sundays.

The Secretary of State has suspended her license for one year, the petition says.

Kepler, 30, who was elected for the first time last fall, faces an April 21 pretrial in 44th District Court in Royal Oak on the two charges. She was arrested about 2 a.m. Feb. 1 after she was involved in a minor accident, drove a short distance and stopped to make a call on her cell phone.

(Does anyone know if she got her license back? Did Mickey Switalski or Harold Haugh pull any strings for her?)