

Illegal Beer Run

By Reg P. Wydeven
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Last week I caught 'The Departed' on TV. The modern classic directed by Martin Scorsese stars Leonardo DiCaprio as a Massachusetts State Police officer who goes to jail as part of an undercover operation. Once released, he joins Jack Nicholson's mob crew in the hopes of arresting him.

In the meantime, Matt Damon, who was raised by Nicholson, joins the State Police to act as a mole for the crime boss. The movie also stars Mark Wahlberg, Martin Sheen and Alec Baldwin. The awesome flick won four Oscars, including best picture and director. The film shows the psychological, emotional and physical dangers of leading a double life. The suspense is unbelievable and [Spoiler Alert!] things don't end well for either DiCaprio or Damon.

So I definitely got the impression that undercover work is extremely perilous and not for the faint of heart. Although apparently, going undercover is not always terrible.

The Maple Tavern in Maple Grove, Minnesota, was the target of an undercover investigation conducted by the state's Department of Public Safety. Officers went deep undercover to infiltrate a sinister criminal plot by...ordering beer.

Spotted Cow beer, specifically. Brewed by Wisconsin's own New Glarus, Spotted Cow was sold on tap at Maple Tavern. The tavern's Facebook page even featured a photo of a Spotted Cow tap handle.

The problem is, New Glarus is only licensed in Wisconsin as a manufacturer of alcoholic beverages. Accordingly, it's illegal to distribute New Glarus beer to an out-of-state retail establishment. In addition, neither Maple Tavern nor its manager is licensed to transport or import alcoholic beverages into Minnesota. The brewery's motto is actually "Only in Wisconsin!" and its website boasts "You know you're in Wisconsin when you see the Spotted Cow."

Investigators from Minnesota's alcohol and gambling enforcement division obtained a search warrant in Hennepin County after receiving a tip from the Wisconsin Department of Revenue, who got an anonymous complaint. The investigation revealed that Maple Tavern's manager crossed the border numerous times between February 20 and April 4 to buy six kegs of Spotted Cow beer from a liquor store in Hudson.

After this discovery, officers visited the establishment and ordered and were served Spotted Cow beer. While no charges have yet been filed in the case, it is a felony in Minnesota to transport or import alcoholic beverages for resale unless it's from an alcohol wholesaler, manufacturer and/or brewer. So the manager of Maple Tavern is facing prison time and a hefty fine for selling beer.

Strangely enough, this isn't the first time Spotted Cow has been sold illegally out-of-state: similar situations have happened in Illinois and New York.

Unlike the hazardous undercover work in 'The Departed,' I'm guessing officers lined up to volunteer for the Maple Tavern assignment.

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