

Cutting a deal

Under pressure from mayor and citizens, Citgo owner nixes knife/water pipe sales

It's 3 a.m. on a Tuesday night, and you need a hand-blown glass "tobacco" pipe and a razor-sharp, foot-long Bowie knife, like, *right now*. Where do you go? Until this week the Citgo gas station and Beer Cave on Broadway and East Chester Street was there to fulfill those needs and more.

Now, under pressure from city leaders and neighborhood activists, the store's owner has vowed to cut the unsavory — albeit legal — items from his inventory.

When some 75 residents of Kingston's 9th Ward gathered for a neighborhood meeting at the Coach House Players theater on Augusta Street Monday night, Jan. 22, the inventory at the 24-hour Citgo station was high on the list of topics for discussion.

West Chester Street resident Rebecca Martin, who organized the meeting, was appalled when she noticed the display of exotic knives and smoking apparatus on display, all available to anyone over age 18. Other neighbors complained about "shady characters" hanging around the 24/7 operation.

On Monday, though, Mayor James Sottile said the store's 24-hour status may be the key to getting rid of the knives and pipes. According to Sottile, the Citgo was allowed to stay open 24 hours under the terms of a special use permit from the Kingston Planning Board, which must be renewed annually. He offered to

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PHOTOS BY STEVE HOPKINS

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"I'm going to play hardball with him," Sottile promised at the Monday night meeting. "I'm going to tell him: 'You need to be a good neighbor;



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On Monday night, store manager Amir Ali stood behind the counter servicing a steady stream of customers buying beer, cheap cigars and Lotto tickets and said he resented the heavy-handed tactics. Kingston police had come into the store on Friday and seized a number of knives from his inventory that were deemed illegal to possess under state law. And he'd been summoned to a sit-down at the mayor's office.

"They can't just come in here and say to me, 'I can be your best friend or your worst enemy.' That's not how you do things," said Ali. He con-

ceded though, that letting go of the pipes and blades wouldn't bankrupt the operation.

"I make some money with them, but it's not my major business," he said.

After the Tuesday meeting between Sottile, Martin and Ali, the store manager agreed to get rid of the objectionable items — a process that should be completed by week's end. In an e-mail sent to neighborhood residents, Martin asked people to drop into the Citgo to thank Ali for his cooperation.

Sottile said he was glad Ali agreed to drop the knives and pipes from his inventory, but added that there was no quid-pro-quo agreement re-