

# Gourmeltz restaurant raided for selling alcohol without a license

Scott Shenk



Gourmeltz, a restaurant in Cosner's Corner in Spotsylvania, was recently raided by State Police and the Virginia ABC.

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The Virginia Alcohol and Beverage Control raided a Spotsylvania County restaurant Friday morning to execute a search warrant alleging the business has been selling alcohol without a license.

The owner of Gourmeltz, Matt Strickland, has battled the state since 2020, claiming the COVID rules implemented by the state during the pandemic were unconstitutional. He refused to comply with mask, social distancing and other mandates ordered by

then-Gov. Ralph Northam by continuing to operate the restaurant even with his food and alcohol licenses suspended by the state.

In January 2021, the Virginia Department of Health suspended Gourmeltz's health permit. The restaurant has stayed open while the case meandered through the court system.



Virginia State Police raided a Spotsylvania restaurant on Friday, seizing alcohol and records based on allegations the restaurant continued to sell alcohol after its ABC license was suspended for violations during the pandemic.

The health department eventually dropped its case, but the Virginia Alcohol and Beverage Control continued with its case.

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The department served a court order November 14 suspending the restaurant's license for 90 days following a court ruling affirming the restaurant violated the state's COVID-19 emergency restrictions at the height of the pandemic.

Strickland, who is campaigning for the area's 27th District State Senate seat, said at the time that he would continue to sell alcohol at the restaurant.

The 39-year-old U.S. Army veteran also said at the time that he was willing to go to jail.

In a Friday statement, the Virginia ABC said it was executing the search warrant for "records and information related to possession of alcoholic beverages without a license, maintaining a common nuisance and the illegal sale of alcoholic beverages" because "the establishment failed to comply with ABC's Board Order and continued to serve beer, wine and mixed beverages to customers."

In a video livestreamed on his campaign Facebook page Friday, Strickland approached the Virginia State Police troopers helping execute the search warrant in his restaurant as alcohol was being removed.



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He asked them what they were doing and chastised them for supporting “government overreach” that he said violated his rights.

The police at the scene told Strickland they were there to confiscate alcohol and records related to sales of alcohol based on the search warrant.

He asked the officers how they felt about what they were doing. Several said they were doing their job.

“Just doing your job? That’s what they said in Germany, too, man. They’re just doing their job,” he said.

“You’re part of the problem,” Strickland continued as he panned the video showing several officers.

Strickland narrated the scene by decrying the COVID mandates.

“It set small businesses back so many years,” he said in the video. “It destroyed small businesses. It destroyed families. It destroyed our community. It destroyed our country. And nobody in here gives a damn about that. They’re just doing their job.”

One officer eventually said Strickland needed to stop and warned him not to cross beyond a certain point or he could be arrested for obstructing the search warrant execution.

Another officer then asked the restaurant owner if he would help them access his computer records on alcohol sales.

“What do you need to see it for? I’m telling you I’m selling alcohol. That’s all the proof you need,” Strickland said before asking his wife to help the officers get the records.

It isn’t clear what punishment Strickland could face. According to State Code, selling alcohol without a license is a Class 1 misdemeanor, which carries a penalty of up to one year in jail and/or a \$2,500 fine.

***This article has been updated to state clearly that the Virginia Alcohol and Beverage Control initiated the raid and the Virginia State Police assisted.***

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