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PRESS RELEASE

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Art Museum alcohol, security practices questioned in review by State Auditor Ralph Campbell

RALEIGH _ The North Carolina Museum of Art wrongly served alcohol at internal events during working hours and allowed access to restricted areas of the museum without asking for identification, according to an investigative review released by State Auditor Ralph Campbell Thursday.

A caller to the State Auditor's Hotline told investigators that the Museum had scheduled a retirement party for a departing employee and would be serving alcoholic beverages on the premises. The caller said the practice was common.

An auditor was sent to the Museum to investigate the allegation. The auditor entered the employee's entrance at the Museum and told the security guard she was "there for the party." The guard gave her a visitor's pass without asking for identification and another employee escorted her to the photography studio, which is a restricted area.

The auditor observed about 35 to 40 people at the party, some of whom were drinking what appeared to be beer. After confirming that alcohol was being served, the auditor identified herself and asked that the alcoholic beverages be removed.

The auditor was able to interview 19 people at the party, 10 of whom said they had consumed alcoholic beverages. Others attending the party left as soon as the auditor identified herself. Both State and Museum Foundation employees attended the party, which was scheduled from 3p.m. to 5 p.m.. Some said they had taken leave to attend the party, but others said they had not.

Museum officials initially argued that they could offer alcoholic beverages because the Museum operates a restaurant with alcoholic beverage permits. But Alcohol Law Enforcement officials said those permits do not allow employees to consume alcohol unless they are out of uniform and on leave.



Museum of Art officials, in response to the review, said they would cease serving alcoholic beverages at staff social events. And they said they would tighten the Museum's security practices.

"With our heightened attention to homeland security, it is essential that our state museums be especially vigilant to safeguard the millions of dollars worth of artwork and historical artifacts they hold in trust for the citizens of North Carolina," Campbell said. "It is just not acceptable that someone be able to waltz into a restricted area without so much as a basic identification check.

"And of course it is never acceptable, and never has been, for state employees to consume alcoholic beverages while at work," Campbell said.

The report is available on-line at <http://www.ncauditor.net/EPSWEB/EDSreportdetail.asp?RepNum=INV-2003-0263>.

Copies of the report may be obtained at the office's web site at www.ncauditor.net. Printed copies of the report can be obtained by filing a request under the Audits section of the web site or by calling the Office of the State Auditor at 919-807-7500.

