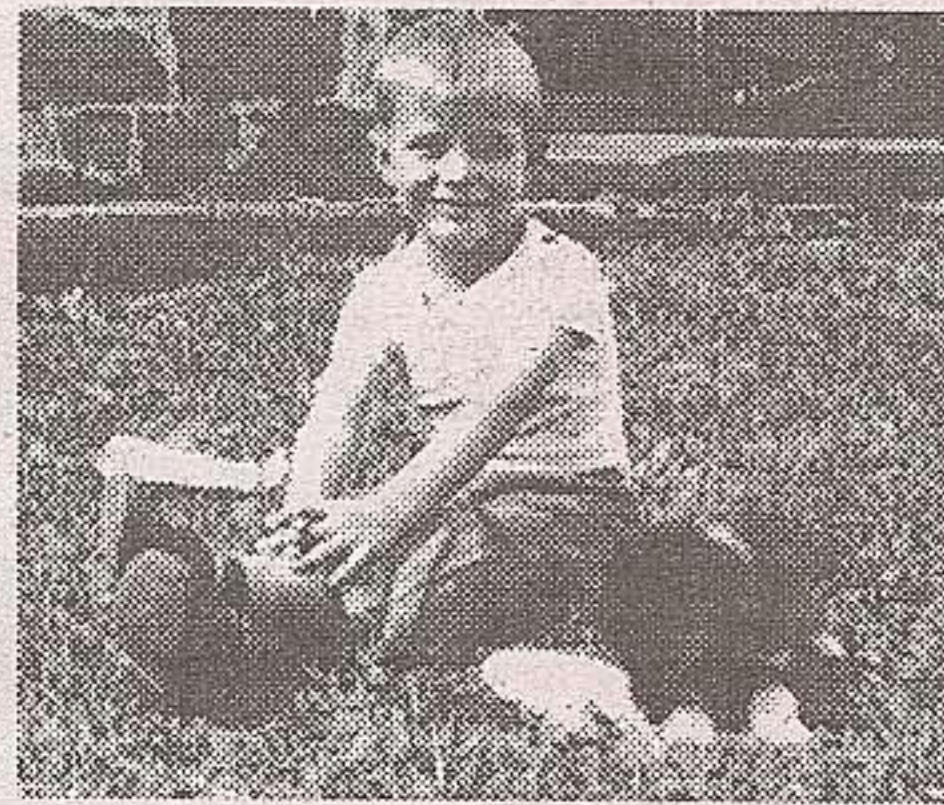


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Says MADD president New impaired driving laws 'a step in the right direction'

Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) Halton president Stephanie Dooley calls tougher new drunk driving laws "a step in the right direction," but believes they could have been even stiffer.

"I don't see why the government is waiting for the fourth offence to take their licence," said Dooley. "I feel they should be doing that with the second offence."

Under new measures that came into effect in the province September 30, second time offenders now face a three-year licence suspension, up from two years. Drivers convicted of a third offence will lose their licence for life but can have it reinstated if they maintain a clean record for 10 consecutive years and meet certain conditions. A fourth-time offender will never get a driver's licence in Ontario again.

"It's a step in the right direction but I think sometimes you really have to get tough for people to learn," said Dooley.

Under the new laws convicted first-time drinking drivers have to complete a mandatory education program and repeat offenders must undergo an assessment to determine if they would benefit from either an education or treatment program. Offenders must successfully complete and pay for a remedial measures program and drivers convicted of drinking-driving related criminal code offences will have the offence stay on their record for a minimum of 10 years, up from five.

"We've got the toughest drinking and driving penalties in North America now," said Halton North MPP Ted Chudleigh.

Chudleigh said people are very concerned there are people on the roads who still continue to drink.

"The problem has not abated so perhaps it's time to get them off the roads," said Chudleigh. He said increased fines are not getting the message through. Chudleigh said about 800 people are killed each year on Ontario's roads, and two-thirds of those deaths involve alcohol.

"It's an absolutely innocent victim that has to pay the price for these crimes," he said.

—By Lisa Tallyn, staff writer

Seat-belt blitz wraps up

Halton police laid 351 seat-belt charges during their fall seat-belt campaign that wrapped up on Saturday.

During the campaign, called Operation Impact, police checked 18,299 vehicles across the region and the results showed there is a 98.1 per cent compliance rate for seat-belt use. Five drinking and driving charges were laid and 45 roadside sobriety tests were done. Eight charges of drive under suspension were also laid.

During last year's campaign Halton police stopped 3,182 vehicles and laid 37 seat belt charges and six impaired driving charges.

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