

# Impaired driving sky rockets

The program to Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere (RIDE) is more manifest than ever in Penetanguishene - but so apparently is impaired driving.

Constable Don Penrose of the Penetanguishene Police reports that on the first weekend of RIDE's holiday impaired driving blitz, seven people were accused of driving while under the influence of alcohol.

"We've never had that many before," Penrose says.

Although the RIDE program is ongoing and is used to stop impaired driving all year, there is an escalation in the number of police officers used and in the hours of operation during the Yuletide Season.

"You kind of wonder with all the publicity concerning drunk driving, why so many people are obviously disregarding it. The figures have definitely increased this year from the year before and I'm a bit surprised."

These people were not on the average just slightly impaired either. Penrose says the lowest blood/alcohol reading was .14 while the highest was an astounding .21: that's almost three times as much as the legal limit

of .08 allows.

If you're driving up Main or Roberts Streets on a Friday or Saturday night between 11:30 p.m. and 1:45 a.m. then you can expect to meet the police.

Penrose says some people were trying to avoid detection by quickly turning off the street or stopping.

"One night we were stationed on Robert Street and Main Street and the OPP was looking after Fuller Avenue. It was difficult to avoid us that night," he says.

Penrose says he is happy to see more designated drivers than ever before.

"People are at least starting to use that terminology. They are becoming more aware of the alternatives to drunk driving."

The ALERT box has enabled spot checks to be more effective than ever. Now police don't have to drag a suspect down to the station to ascertain whether he has been drinking beyond the legal limit. People have learned to dread the night when someone leans through their car window and asks, "Have you been drinking tonight?"

The Director of Counter-Measures, a group which documents the effects of impaired driving upon society, says fewer people are

drinking and driving today than in 1980. David Bruce cites the figures for impaired driving crashes for instance. In 1980, there were 30,101 of these and in 1986 17,723: that's a 40 per cent reduction.

Bruce claims many factors have been at work to generate such results: general public concern, the rise of victim's groups like Mothers Against Drunk Driving and Students Against Drunk Driving, increased education in the workplace and school, more enforcement programs like RIDE and drastically increased penalties.

"It was very significant when the minimum licence suspension was quadrupled from three months to a year," Bruce says.

In Simcoe County, drunk driving crashes fell from 996 in 1980 to 640 in 1986.

The figures for the county have been "going down fairly steadily over the past few years," but "Simcoe's rate is still higher than the provincial average."

Bruce says impaired driving is always more common in rural areas than it is in urban ones.

This is not just due to stubborn attitudes though. Not only is the rate of alcohol consumption higher in the country, there are

often few alternative means of transportation.

Carl Burton of the Alcohol & Drugs Concerns Inc. has also noticed the unbalance between urban and rural figures. Geographically speaking, Burton says "the farther north you go, the greater the problem."

But Burton doesn't think the RIDE program by itself is sufficient ammunition to combat impaired driving. He says it merely "scares people" and makes them imagine new ways to avoid detection.

"We believe that it is important to deal with the whole problem. There must be more preventative education which deals with the underlying causes of alcohol and drug abuse. Alcohol use is the greatest drug problem in the country; we should be just as concerned about why people drink so much as we are about them drinking and driving."

Burton's organisation has initiated an impaired driving program of its own. It's called Stop Impaired Probationaries in Toronto (SIPIT) and although Burton says he "doesn't much care for" the acronym, he calls the program "very effective."

SIPIT is aimed at repeat offenders, those who will rack up as many as seven convictions before the message sinks in.

## Fares for the ferry?

An annual payment which natives on Christian Island receive every year for Christmas gifts may be in trouble this year.

The amount of money given is based on the size of the family. Band Councillor Floyd King says the program was initiated about four years ago.

But funding for the ferry which transports Christian Island residents free of charge is becoming scarce. King explains that a recent questionnaire asked whether people were willing to pay a fare to use the boat service.

King personally doubts whether the Christmas fund will be used to subsidize the ferry expenses.

"We have to look at a lot of other things first," he says.

Don Garrow is the Superintendent for Band Support Services with the Ministry of Indian Affairs. He says in the past, the ferry service was entirely subsidised by the ministry but now, "We are negotiating with the band for a fare structure."

The cost of operating the boat is approximately \$110,000 a year. Right now, only 50 per cent of that has been paid for.

Boyd Jamieson, the Economic Director of Christian Island, says the annuity has "not been discussed as a source of revenue as far as I know."

Chief Bernard McCue refused to discuss the subject, calling it "confidential." He hung up on this newspaper when questioned further.



Chief Bernard McCue

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## The Seniors are still swinging

They might be the most vivacious group of ladies that you'll ever meet.

They're sitting in one of the rooms in the headquarters of the Georgian Shores Swinging Seniors, knitting and talking about their club.

It's Thursday afternoon and this is the day when the arts and crafts are made. On a table, some of the work is displayed: it's covered with the spirit of Christmas, little bits and pieces of the season, Santa and his elves, angels, little Christmas trees.

The women sell them year round but business skyrockets during Christmas.

Margorie La Grandeur, the Arts and Crafts hostess, says the knitted items are the best paying sales. The crafts may be purchased anytime but occasionally, the Swinging Seniors plan to have a one- or two-day bazaar. A recent day in November was tremendously successful.

La Grandeur speaks with pride about the quilts which the women made. These were raffled off and the proceeds have to various hospitals throughout Huronia. In total, \$2,000 was raised for Midland, \$1,000 for Penetanguishene and \$1,000 for Barrie.

But the crafts are such a small part of what the Swinging Seniors - men and women - do. The monthly dances are said to be "memorable."

Peg Preston describes one woman who is 84-years-old. "You should see this one woman dance; she could stump any of the younger folks. She's up for every dance."

The ladies deliberate for a moment and speculate on the source of her energy: someone says, "I think she was on the stage and her husband was a professional singer."

The music played at these dances is quite eclectic: there're tunes from the last 50 years. "We're not called Swinging Seniors for nothing," insists Gertrude Edginton.

The club operates a bar too, with "the

cheapest prices in town." But Preston insists that she has "never seen anyone worse for wear."

Although the seniors have about 195 members, you don't have to belong to attend the dances are go to the club house.

The benefits of being a member include voting rights on club business, attendance at the Christmas dinner and a special birthday party every year.

Edginton remembers how the club got started back in 1973. Marguerite Ridout was the inspiration for the venture.

Property on Balm Beach Road was pur-

chased. Members did some of the building and most of the finishing work. The building was quickly paid for after it was finished.

It was ready for occupancy in 1976 and officially opened in March 1977.

Ridout, the club pioneer is still a faithful member.

That's not hard to understand when you consider that this is a club which is well-travelled. The members have gone to Niagara Falls, Nashville Tennessee and on a Caribbean cruise.

They are conducting a massive membership drive in Tiny next month.



### What do you think?

Jeanne Ross holds up one of the crafts she has just completed as Rena Belcourt looks on. The women are members of the Arts and Crafts group, a division of the Georgian

Shores Swinging Seniors. The club has 195 members, both male and female, and keeps people from 50 to 90 busy, happy and healthy.

Inside: Artists challenge Arts Council