

Jail visit a sobering experience

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hall from the telephone room to take a breathalyser test.

Const. Deb Buchanan, who has only recently been certified as a breathalyser technician, says drunk drivers are brought to the station day and night.

"We get them at night. We get them in the daytime. We call them businessman's lunches," she said.

Pleskina leaves Buchanan alone in the room to administer the test, being careful to back out of the room.

He never turns his back on a suspect.

"I've been here for 12-1/2 years. I still walk up with a sense of caution. I walk back with a sense of caution."

If the suspect is acting rationally, Buchanan is comfortable allowing the test to be taken without any handcuffs.

However, she admits each person reacts differently to being arrested.

Some are volatile. "It's like you're with God one minute and the devil the next."

Buchanan also acknowledges appearances can be deceiving.

Some experienced drunks can seem sober — until the breathalyser reveals the truth.

"You have people that come in here who are seasoned veterans, who appear sober but you wouldn't believe the readings you get. You have other people who seem extremely inebriated, whose readings are low."

According to Buchanan, officers have to rely on other factors such as the suspect's demeanour, physical characteristics and ability to perform tasks when analysing charges to be laid.

People caught driving drunk can be charged with driving "over .80."

But drivers who don't meet that benchmark but are still inebriated can also face impaired driving charges.

Buchanan, who also makes sure

suspects have a chance to contact a lawyer before she administers the test, says the breathalyser must be given within two hours of being stopped by police.

Some suspects have gone to great lengths to delay the test.

"I've had somebody talking on the phone to their lawyer. But it turned out nobody's on the other end of the line."

However, suspects who deliberately delay the test can be charged with failing to provide a breath sample.

After the test, I'm taken to the cells.

Only one suspect is placed in each cell and men and women are kept in different areas.

Suspects considered dangerous or charged with heinous crimes are kept segregated.

There can be few more lonely or unnerving sounds in the world than hearing that barred door slam shut, trapping you in the small cell where the only amenities are a hard bed and a metal sink and toilet.

Processing paper work on drunk driving charges can take about four hours, according to Pleskina.

Because I'm left in the cells for hours while Pleskina finishes my paper work, I get fed.

Suspects are treated to take-out from McDonald's.

Before I'm given an order to appear in court by the staff sergeant, I'm fingerprinted.

Normally, a mug shot is taken at the Newmarket courthouse. But because the building is closed while toxic mould is removed, mugs are now taken at the station.

Before I leave, I'm given back my jewelry, shoelaces and money.

That's it — until my court appearances begin.

A night of fear and inconvenience. The prospect of losing my driver's licence and my job.

All because of a stupid decision to drink and drive.

Busted.

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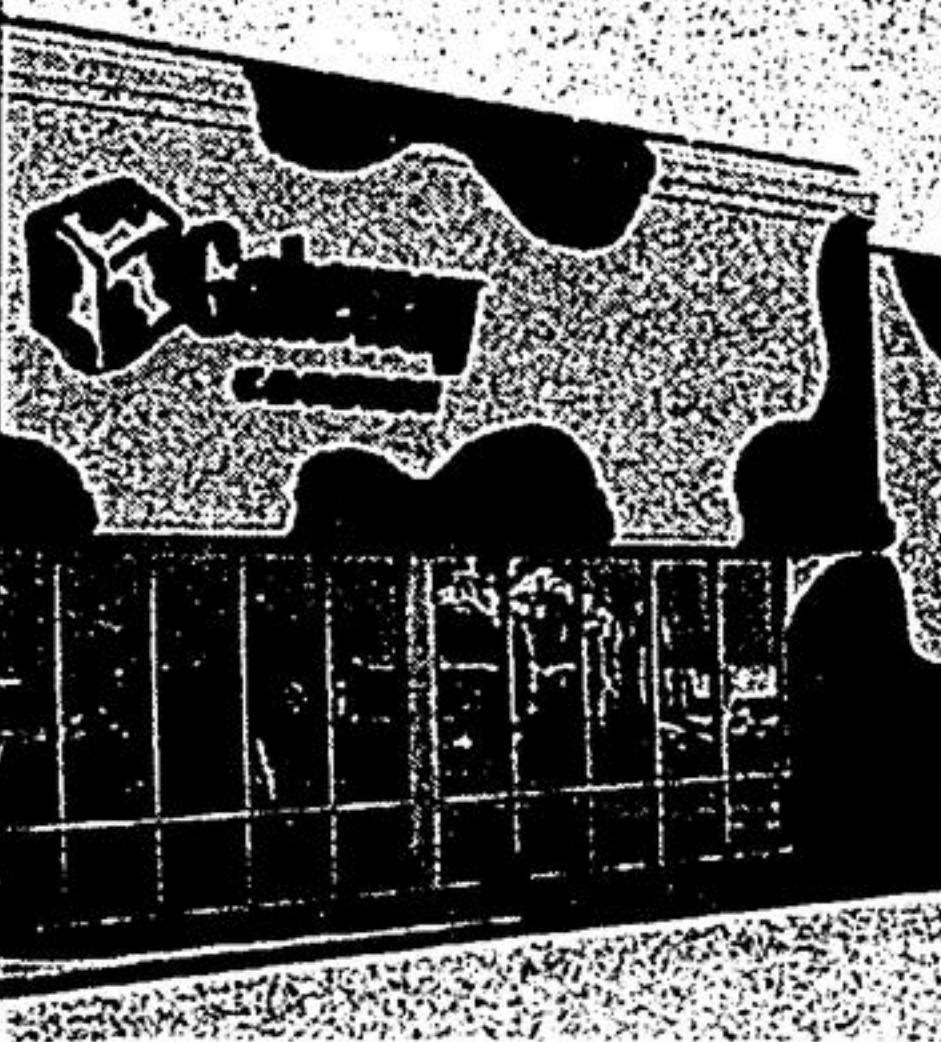
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