

Body rub charges on rise

BY LISA QUEEN
Staff Writer

An expected crackdown on body rub parlours in Toronto won't drive an influx of the spas north to York Region, a York Regional Police drugs and vice officer predicts.

"We know we've tightened down so much, certain places (parlours) are going to Toronto instead of York because of our aggressive enforcement up here," Det.-Const. Gary McBride said.

"We have one of the most dedicated vice squads in the GTA."

Toronto council is expected to tighten rules and increase fees for holistic spas, which are often fronts for prostitution and other illegal activities, when it meets Tuesday.

But that doesn't mean the parlours will move north, Det.-Const. McBride said.

"I don't have any concerns. We're rapidly reducing the number of body rub parlours in York Region," he said, although he was unable to provide numbers.

"We have several folding this week and next week. That's from working with police, municipal bylaw officers and the owners of the industrial units (where tenants operate parlours)."

'We're rapidly reducing the number of body rub parlours in York Region. We have several folding this week and next week.'

Det.-Const. Gary McBride
York Regional Police

Although Vaughan was late to come on board, Det.-Const. McBride credited York's municipal bylaw enforcement units for helping to keep a lid on illegal activities at licensed and unlicensed parlours.

Last spring, a police inspector sharply criticized Vaughan's lax attitude.

In a letter to the city, now-retired Insp. Denis Mulholland said "little, if any" enforcement was being conducted by bylaw officers.

"This differs significantly from the aggressive approach two other municipalities have taken, namely Richmond Hill and Markham," he wrote.

"Without the co-operation of the city, we cannot effectively enforce the bylaw and eliminate these illegal establishments from operating within your city."

York Regional Police and your bylaw enforcement officers are aware that some of these establishments operate as fronts for open prostitution within your city and require frequent inspections."

The criticism prompted council to dedicate the equivalent of a full-time bylaw officer to police body rub parlours starting in May.

"The City of Vaughan has dedicated people who are working with police, who are doing their own bylaw inspections," said Det.-Const. McBride, who covers Markham.

"They have been out there pounding them. Definitely, they've been out enforcing."

Tony Thompson, senior manager of Vaughan's bylaw department, was unavailable to comment on the results of Vaughan's increased enforcement over the last two months.

In May, he acknowledged the city was laying far fewer charges than its neighbours.

Last year, about 100 bylaw charges were laid in Vaughan compared to 320 in Richmond Hill, he said.

City solicitor Bob Swayze said bylaw officers laid 44 charges against parlour attendants and owners over a three-week period since beefing up enforcement.



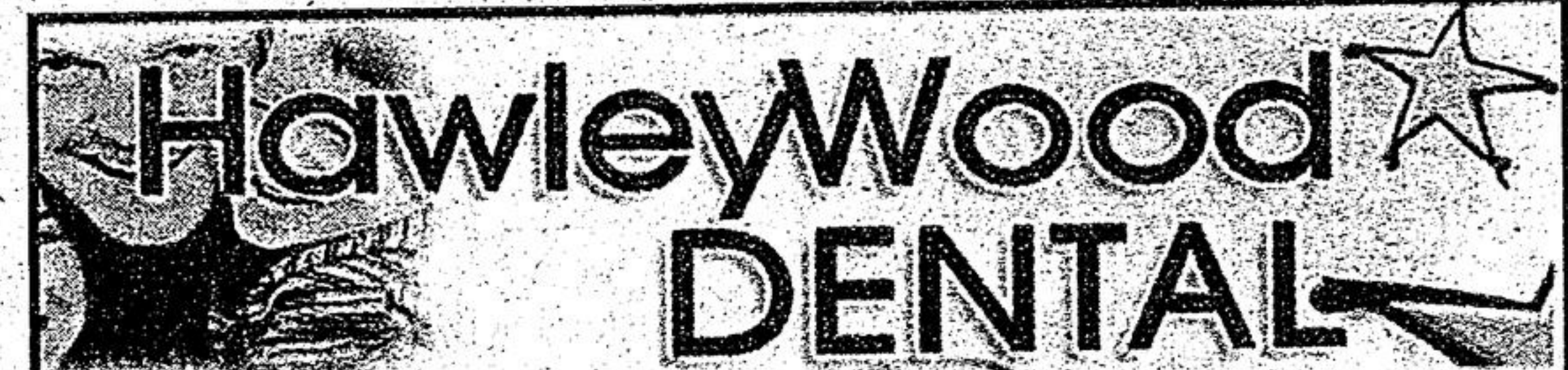
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