

Tougher drunk-driving penalties applauded

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Anyone planning a night out this weekend should pay special attention to how many drinks they have before getting behind

the wheel.

Midnight on May 1 marked the beginning of tough new drinking and driving penalties in the province.

The changes will affect drivers who regis-

ter a breathalyzer test in the "warn range" — a reading of between 50 and 80 milligrams of alcohol in 100 millilitres of blood, commonly known as blood alcohol levels registering between 0.05 and 0.08.

Before May 1, a driver in the warn range received a 12-hour driving suspension.

But as of yesterday, a driver caught in the warn range for the first time, will receive a three-day driver's licence suspension and a \$150 administrative penalty to get back their licence, the Ministry of Transportation said.

"It is changing the way we have traditionally done business," said Staff Sgt. Brad Bulmer, the York Regional Police traffic bureau commander. "This is really putting some teeth into a tool we have been using for years."

According to York police statistics, 1,375 impaired driving and related violations were reported in 2008.

Under the new rules, a driver caught with warning levels of alcohol in their system, within five years of their first offence, would receive a seven-day licence suspension, a mandatory alcohol education program and the \$150 licence charge.

A third time will net drivers a 30-day licence suspension, mandatory alcohol treatment and six months with an ignition interlock.

It's a welcome change for Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

A 12-hour suspension is not long enough to send a strong message about impaired driving. MADD Canada's chief executive

Andrew Murrie said.

The organization worked with the provinces about three years ago to develop an escalating model of punishment for impaired drivers who blow in the warn range, rather than reducing the criminal legal limit to .05.

"I'm very glad it's finally implemented," Mr. Murrie said.

What the escalating penalties for those who blow in excess of .05 does not do is punish drivers who have a glass of wine or a beer with their dinners, he said.

While a suspension is not a criminal charge, it cannot be appealed and will be recorded on your driving record, the province said.

Once seized, your licence will be sent to the transportation ministry. You will not be allowed to drive home, but if you are with a sober and licenced passenger, that person may be allowed to drive you home.

If your vehicle is towed away, it will be done at your expense, the province said.

"It makes it a much more effective roadside tool," Staff Sgt. Bulmer said. "Hopefully it is going to deter borderline offenders. To have that attached to your record has to be the motivating factor."

Because the suspensions will be placed on your record, if you are suspended from driving in York, climb back into your car and are pulled over in Toronto, an officer in that city will now know you have been suspended, he added.

In 2005, one of every six drinking drivers killed had a blood alcohol concentration of less than 0.08, provincial statistics indicate.



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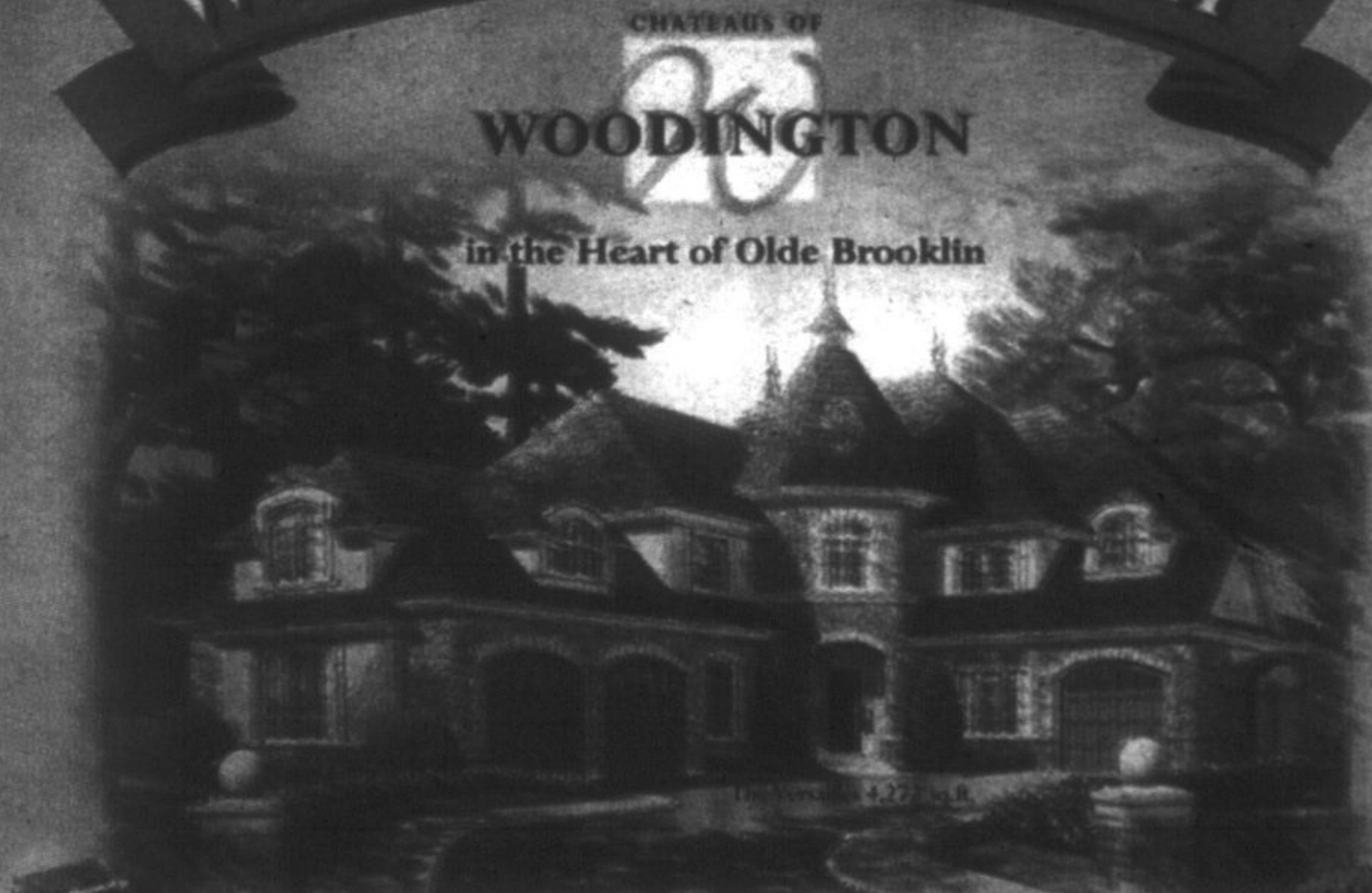
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