

DISTRACTED DRIVER CRACKDOWN

Motorists continue to ignore law

BY JOE FANTAUZZI
jfantauzzi@yrmg.com

After one year and about 3,000 tickets, York police officers posed as construction workers this week to drive home the message to distracted motorists.

Sitting in his unmarked cruiser, facing Davis Drive just west of Yonge Street in Newmarket, the crackle of traffic bureau Sgt. Ed Villamere's police radar was constant.

The voices of undercover officers decked out in construction garb, could be heard over the radio, calling in drivers spotted with cellphones in hand or seatbelts unbuckled.

"We've noticed people have gotten right back into their old habits," Sgt. Villamere said. "They're on the phone constantly talking and texting."

An undercover officer, wearing a white construction hard hat, stood on a traffic island near the entrance to Upper Canada Mall, keeping an eye on drivers passing by.

York officers blitzed Davis, between Yonge and Eagle streets Tuesday on what was the one-year anniversary of the province's so-called distracted driving law. Police issued tickets to drivers caught using a handheld electronic device behind the wheel.

The regionwide blitz wraps up tomorrow. From his cruiser, Sgt. Villamere could see constables Anthony Gifuni and Mike McKeraghan standing against the freezing cold, keeping a close eye on motorists on Davis between Eagle and Yonge.

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ON THE WEB

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construction hard hat, stood on a traffic island near the entrance to Upper Canada Mall, keeping an eye on drivers passing by.

Other officers were stationed near Yonge and Green Lane, Sgt. Villamere said.

The distracted driving law took effect Oct. 26, 2009.

However, police began laying charges Feb. 1, 2010 after the province provided a three-month grace period to drivers.

York police issued 2,931 tickets and warned more than 700 drivers for distracted driving, as of Friday.

Sgt. Villamere handed out two tickets to motorists using cellphones on his way to the blitz and another to a truck driver on Yonge.

"Clearly there is an issue," Sgt. Villamere said. "The time for warnings has passed."

Driving requires a lot of multitasking without a cellphone providing more distraction, he added.

"It's no time to be dialing the telephone, to be on the phone or sending text messages," he said. "You've got enough to do to keep yourself safe as it is."

Some motorists, caught driving and dialing, exhibited such poor driving, they could have been mistaken as impaired drivers, Sgt. Villamere said.

Widespread compliance with the legislation, which calls for a \$155 fine if you are caught, may take some time, police said.

"You're always going to get some people who are going to thumb their nose at it and continue to do what they're doing," Sgt. Villamere said.

Police dog nabs second suspect in Stouffville construction site

Two 23-year-old Whitchurch-Stouffville men have been charged with theft over \$5,000, possession of property obtained by crime, possession of break and enter instruments and mischief under \$5,000 in relation to an incident at a local construction site Jan. 23.

At about 4 a.m., York Regional Police officers responded to the Mantle Avenue and Greendale Road area of southern Stouffville to check on a report of two sus-

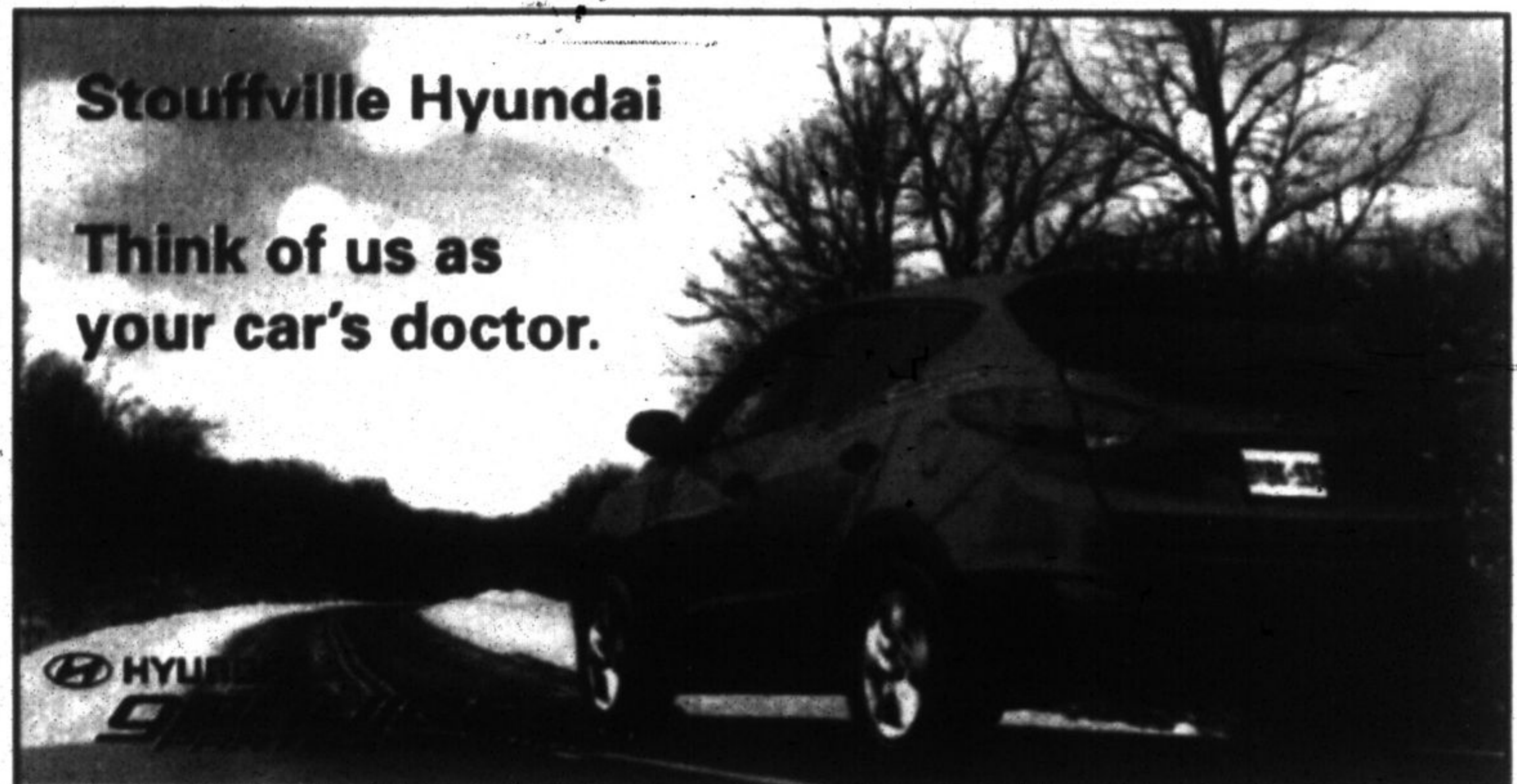
picious men in the subdivision's construction area.

Video surveillance showed two people removing a lock from a container and taking out material.

When police arrived, the suspects were gone. However, when officers searched the area, one suspect surrendered.

An officer from the canine unit attended the scene to assist in the search for the second suspect. He was found hiding under the porch of a newly constructed home.

Both men are to appear in Newmarket court.



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