

Everyone from courts to bars to feel effects

By Casey Hane
Staff Writer

Tougher drunk driving laws will change operations at the 47th District Court, prompt bar and restaurant owners to market non-alcohol products, dig deep into the pockets of those convicted, and raise the expenses of local police departments.

District Judge Frederick Harris expects the new laws will have a

dramatic impact on the court, which serves the cities of Farmington and Farmington Hills. The new law mandates courts to resolve cases within 77 days — which previously could be adjourned and postponed indefinitely — Harris said the court may have to consider a public defender system in which a full-time attorney would sit at the court to keep the paperwork and caseload flowing.

"I think it's going to have a tremendous impact on the court," Harris said. "What that's going to be, I don't know yet." He said the system would be reviewed over the next two months before any massive changes are made in court operations.

"We're going to take a look at it for a couple of months — the last thing we need... is a knee-jerk reaction," he added.

MEANWHILE, RESTAURANT

and bar operators are bracing for the changes which follow the same anti-alcohol sentiments they have felt in recent years.

"We never promoted drunk driving to begin with," said John Kasran, manager at Ginopolis Restaurant in Farmington Hills. "It definitely will hurt businesses. However, we're not a cocktail place as much as an eatery." He said food sales make up about 75 percent of the restaurant's business.

Kasran said at Ginopolis, they promote return businesses to make money, and also encourage patrons to order appetizers and desserts. He said in recent years he has seen a big increase in dessert sales and afternoon coffee, and for those who

drink, there is usually a designated driver present.

"We see a lot more (cases of) five or six people (in a group) and one of them's drinking Coca-Cola," he said. "That helps."

Frank Lauboff, Farmington's public safety director, said the new laws are meant to hit hard, especially on the offender's pocketbook. Increases include stiff fines for driving with a suspended or revoked license which could now cost an offender between \$500 and \$1,000. Other increases include an increase from \$60 to \$125 to reinstate a driver's license.

"Financially, it's going to hurt people more and more," Lauboff said. "We're trying to make the issue an important one."

LAUBOFF SAID the stepped up timetable in the law will also cause more paperwork in local police departments, and more frequent trips to the prosecutor's office which will cost cities and municipalities more money. "We're expecting it's going to cost us more — it's just going to be more processing," he said.

Judge Harris said the tough new law could jam already crowded court dockets and jail cells throughout the state because of heavier penalties and stiffer fines that some can't afford.

If jails become overcrowded with drunk driving offenders, Lauboff said, he expects to see more "recreative custody" ideas such as work release programs and boot camps.

New state law makes drunk drivers pay a higher price

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"They're treating this as the serious crime that it is."

FARMINGTON HILLS Police Chief William Dwyer said the new measure strengthens the "toughest laws, hopefully making drivers think before getting behind the wheel."

A "get tough" stance by local police and the courts has already decreased drunk driving offenses in the Hills. In the first 11 months of this year, there were 284 arrests for operating under the influence of liquor compared with 428 in the same time period last year. He hopes the new laws will help lower the numbers even further.

"We've got that reputation of being tough," he said. "Compared

with a decade ago, we've got less people going out... and getting intoxicated."

Under the new laws, police officers in Farmington and Farmington Hills will immediately confiscate the driver's license of any person stopped for drinking and driving. Though the license will be cut up as part of the arrest process, a temporary license, good for 77 days, will be issued to the person.

The new law mandates the court system to resolve drunk driving cases within 77 days of the arrest date. Previously, cases could stretch into months and even years before they were finalized.

"There's been a lot of societal pressure," Lauboff said. "I think there's more of a coming to terms that this is not acceptable. People

don't see it as funny anymore. There seems to be a changing attitude."

SOME HIGHLIGHTS of the law include:

- Up to a 15-year prison term if a driver kills someone in a crash and is convicted of OUIL or unlawful blood alcohol level.
- Penalties based on both Michigan and out-of-state driving convictions.
- Information about chemical tests now will be admissible to juries. Previously, it was not.
- Fines for driving with a suspended or revoked license will now range from \$300 to \$1,000.

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