

MADD Halton/Peel upset by new bring-your-own-wine rules

■ By Howard Mozel
OAKVILLE BEAVER STAFF

Jeff Gareau says he is disappointed by new provincial bring-your-own-wine (BYOW) regulations, not only as president of MADD Halton/Peel but also as a citizen of Ontario.

"Making it easier for people to consume wine at participating establishments will only serve to decrease public safety on our roads," he said.

The new law permits licensed restaurants and banquet rooms in hotels and motels to allow customers to bring their own bottle of wine. It also permits all licensed establishments to allow their customers to remove an unfinished bot-

tle of wine that they either brought with them or ordered as part of their meal (what the province is calling Take Home the Rest, or THTR).

Establishments are also allowed to determine and charge what's called a "corkage fee" for providing BYOW.

Gareau maintains that increased alcohol consumption will result if inadequate corkage fees are not implemented to "curb the drinking of cheap alcohol," he says. The result of this, he continued, will be more impaired driving offences.

"Many of the minor infractions might never cause harm, God-willing, but inevitably some of these offences will lead to accidents with injuries and possibly even fatalities," he said. "Ask any relative

or friend of a person who has been seriously injured or killed by an impaired driver and you will find that the vast majority are against offering a cheaper way of consuming wine outside of the home. Drinking is a private matter where one can drink all they want inside their own homes, but outside of the home irresponsible drinking can be deadly."

Gareau also worries about the ability of owners and servers to keep tabs on the alcohol content of wines customers bring in as well as limiting consumption.

"It is difficult for me to visualize the situation where a customer is drinking their own wine to surfeit and a staff member or owner coming over to the table indicating that customer will have

to stop drinking wine that they have brought from home," he said.

According to the Province, licensees are required to open BYOW bottles for all patrons while these establishments continue to be responsible for ensuring that over-consumption does not occur. Licensees are also prohibited from serving intoxicated patrons. In addition, THTR discourages excessive consumption, says the Province, by allowing patrons to take home a resealed, unopened bottle of wine.

Along with BYOW and THTR, several changes have been made to increase public safety, maintains the Province. The first allows the Registrar of Alcohol and Gaming to immediately suspend a liquor

licence "in the public interest," such as situations where there is a threat to public safety. The second doubles the minimum fines for offences related to liquor and underage drinkers and the third creates an offence of failing to leave a premise when required to by a police officer, or returning the same day after being asked to leave.

Gareau's sentiments, however, echo those of MADD Canada spokesperson Wanda Kristensen.

"We don't think the Government has appropriately weighed the available empirical research," said Kristensen, Director of Programs at MADD Canada's National Office. "(Consumer and Business Services Minister Jim Watson) hasn't adequately safeguarded the public against the new risks posed by his BYOW law."

Kristensen's son David, 16, was killed in Oakville on November 1996 when the underage driver of a car in which he was a passenger lost control and struck a hydro pole.

MADD Canada's position, Kristensen continued, is that the government failed to set a reasonable corkage fee, "despite the evidence that this measure would significantly curb the availability of cheap wine on the restaurant table." Second, the Province failed to make it mandatory for licensees who opt for BYOW to also have to provide the re-corking option so patrons can bring the rest home.

"As a mother who has lost a son in a alcohol-related crash, I don't want to see families suffer because of the introduction of new, ill-considered regulations," says Kristensen.

"In my mind, governments should err on the side of public safety when they make these types of changes that will, unquestionably, put more drinking drivers on our roads."

Gareau maintains that increased public awareness may lead to more people taking cabs, staying overnight, arranging rides ahead of time, or having sober designated drivers to drive drinkers home.

However, he says, until everyone who drinks outside the home practices responsible proactive measures to get home alive, he remains very apprehensive about the new BYOW law.

"The general public should be as well because an impaired driver can strike at any time of the day affecting the lives of innocent people," said Gareau.

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