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DWI can be tough in Texas

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A person who gets a ticket for driving while intoxicated may be surprised when he is introduced to the Texas judicial system.

That introduction probably will cost him a minimum of \$2,000.

And that's assuming it's his first offense, he has a low breath test and has no other tickets against him.

Despite the public education about the dangers of drinking and driving, it may be the punishment that deters people in the end.

"(Drinking and driving) have been accepted for a long time," said Department of Public Safety trooper James Whaley. "People are learning the dangers of it and learning consequences of it. Up to a few years ago, the penalties were not sufficient to deter it."

Now the penalties, both fines and potential jail terms, have been increased. The fine for a first offense used to be \$50 to \$500; now it ranges from \$100 to \$2,000.

Although some people say punishment doesn't deter criminals, Chief Deputy Dan Weyenberg of the McLennan County Sheriff's Department disagrees.

"I've seen people who are just social drinkers get arrested, locked up and bond out and they



Jayne Wood helped start a MADD chapter in McLennan County

Staff photo — Mike James

haven't been back. It's a sobering experience," he said. "They say punishment is not a deterrent, but I believe punishment is a deterrent."

Attorney Gary Butler says first-time DWI offenders who settle out of court, with no complications and a low breath test, can expect to spend at least \$2,000 in court and legal fees and fines. The total varies (upwardly) with different attorneys and different fines.

Costs that Butler said a DWI

offender can expect include an average of \$400 to \$500 in attorney fees. If bail is set at \$1,000, the defendant probably will pay \$150 to a bondsman as a 15 percent charge on a \$1,000 surety bond. Court costs are \$105, and there is a mandatory driving school that costs \$40. The probation fee is \$30 a month, so if the defendant receives a two-year probation, that adds up to \$725. The DWI fine ranges from \$100 to \$2,000. Butler said defendants who plea-bargain average be-

tween \$500 and \$1,200.

The defendant also must pay a fee to get his car back if it has been towed, and the fee varies depending on how long it has been in storage. If the case goes to court, defendants will have increased court costs.

DWI sentences for first offenders range from three days to two years in jail, said Assistant District Attorney Dave Deaconson. He said plea bargains usually

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