

# Charity "boot tolls" to Remain for Now

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Norfolk County may have banned fundraising boot tolls but don't expect the same thing to happen in Haldimand any time soon.

There are no plans to ban the fundraising events in Haldimand County.

County Clerk Janis Lancaster wasn't aware of any pending bylaw in Haldimand nor has she ever a complaint about the tolls.

The Safe Streets Act which was designed to rid Ontario's streets of "squeegee kids" was passed by the province in 1999 and despite the government's best intentions, the law also made it illegal for legitimate charities to solicit funds from motorists along municipal roadways.

When the bill was first proposed, charities that rely on boot tolls began lobbying for an amendment to the legislation which would exempt them from the act. It never came.

Recently, a boot toll in Welland was shut down after a resident

complained the toll violated the Safe Streets Act.

In Dunnville, two of the five fire stations continue to hold boot tolls, the proceeds of which are usually donated to the Muscular Dystrophy Association.

Pauline Tardif, Director of Development for the Muscular Dystrophy Association's Ontario branch said her organization has been lobbying the government to amend the legislation but without success.

"The problem with the legislation is its ambiguity," said Tardif. "It's open to interpretation."

Although the government never meant to curb the fundraising activities of charitable organizations, there are no plans to amend the legislation.

Since the law has been under challenge in the courts by a group of "squeegee kids" who were charged under the act, staff at the Attorney General's office have been unwilling to discuss the matter.

"It's been frustrating for volunteers

who are doing the fundraising for us," said Tardif.

Each year, the Muscular Dystrophy Association receives \$750,000 through firefighter boot tolls which represents 10 per cent of the organization's national budget.

"Last year, we lost \$200,000 in revenue and the most recent incident in Welland cost us \$15,000 in lost revenue," she said.

Municipalities across the province have responded differently to the legislation according to Tardif. Some have banned the tolls altogether while others have supported them wholeheartedly.

"The nice thing about it is that municipalities and most police have been very accommodating in working around the legislation."

The Safe Streets Act doesn't prohibit the collection of funds along parade routes so some fire departments have collected along the route or had certain streets designated as parade routes.

Fire departments have been collecting funds for the Muscular Dystrophy Association since 1954.