New law has Ascension DWI arrests up

By TIM TALLEY

River Parishes bureau

DONALDSONVILLE — Law enforcement authorities have arrested 182 persons in Ascension Parish on charges of driving while intoxicated since Jan. 1, when tough penalties for drunk driving went into effect.

DWI arrests in Ascension during the first two months of 1983 are considerably higher than those recorded during the same period in 1982 because of stringent enforcement of the new DWI laws, according to authorities.

The arrests were made by city police, parish deputies or state troopers, according to Capt. Jimmy Day, Troop A commander.

New penalties for drunken driving require that persons convicted of DWI for the first time be given mandatory jail sentences of at least two days or several days of community service work plus a stiff fine.

Persons convicted of DWI for a third time must be sent to jail for no less than one year under the new penalties without the benefit of probation, parole or suspension of sentence.

According to Gonzales arrest records, city police charged 36 persons with DWI in January 1983 compared to only 18 DWI arrests in January 1982.

City police filed DWI charges against 37 persons in February 1983 compared to 22 DWI arrests recorded during the same month last year, the records indicate.

In spite of the city's high volume of DWI arrests, Bourque said, many of those charged are not residents of Gonzales.

Most of the DWIs that we catch are just passing through," said Bourque. "The biggest percentage of them are not from Gonzales.

Bourque said city police have apprehended motorists for drunken driving along major highways in the city as well as along quiet residential streets.

Capt. Day said a state police task force that concentrates on enforcing the DWI laws on weekends has patrolled major highways in Ascension at least two times since Jan. 1 and is largely responsible for the high number of DWI arrests by troopers.

Parish arrest records indicate that state police arrested 40 persons for DWI in January and 35 in February.

A significant number of DWI arrests have been made by troopers along La. 44 and La. 42, state highways which are located east of U.S. 61, said Day.

He said state police have received complaints about drunken drivers traveling to and from bars and lounges which border the highways.

Sheriff's deputies made six DWI arrests in January and 15 in February, the arrest records indicate. All of the sheriff's department's arrests were recorded on the east side of the parish.

Eleven DWI arrests were recorded by city police in Donaldsonville in January and February, according to records at the parish jail in Donaldsonville.

One person was charged with DWI by authorities in Sorrento during the first two months of the year, the records indicate. One other DWI arrest was made by a Gonzales Police Department official but is recorded in parish arrest records.