

DID YOU KNOW???

PROBABLE CAUSE MAY LEAD TO FURTHER VIOLATIONS

If you are a regular reader of the “Police Beat” or “For the Record” or similar columns found in most newspapers, you will often find someone arrested for DWI, or drug possession, or some other violation and, near the end of the write-up for the violation you find that he/she was also charged with some Vehicle and Traffic Law (VTL) violation. The reason for the multiple charges is that the person was originally stopped by enforcement for the VTL violation and upon further investigation, other, often more serious, violations are discovered.

A very good example, frequently encountered, is someone driving while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. What so often is the case is a vehicle and traffic infraction observed by a police officer, such as crossing over the center line, or drifting over the fog line. It could also be something like failing to signal a turn or lane change. Whatever it might be, it is “probable cause” for stopping the vehicle and upon speaking with the driver, the officer may detect the smell of alcohol. This will trigger a field sobriety test, and if the driver fails this, additional charges of DWI may be levied.

Many drivers have been arrested for DWI after having been stopped for something as simple as a burned out tail light, or perhaps not dimming headlights when meeting another vehicle. Other than at a roadblock, where every vehicle is subject to inspection, police officers need some probable cause to stop your vehicle. This is actually pretty easy, as most drivers violate traffic laws constantly, most of the time not even realizing they are doing it. I would expect if I followed any driver for at least one mile in one of our villages I could find them violating at least one vehicle and traffic law.

Many even more serious criminals have been caught because of a simple VTL violation. This September an early morning traffic stop for speeding in the Village of Malone led to the discovery of a trunk full of marijuana (140 pounds), destined for New York City. What would have been a speeding ticket turned into a felony marijuana possession charge and a stay in the Franklin County jail in lieu of \$100,000 bail.



Robbers and even murderers have been apprehended all because of a simple traffic stop. It would be a certainty that many a criminal has chastised themselves for a simple violation that led to their arrest for a serious crime.

So, if you think it’s not important to signal each and every turn and lane change, or it’s no big deal to drive with a light out or an expired inspection sticker, think again. These are the things that enforcement officials can pull you over for, and could very likely result in a ticket resulting in a fine and points on your license.