

BACK STORY

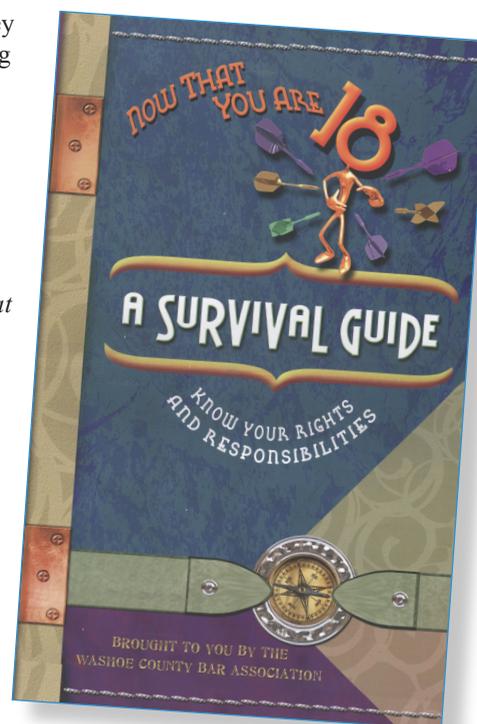
THE WASHOE COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION AIMS ITS *SURVIVAL GUIDE* AT 18 YEAR OLDS

BY RYAN SULLIVAN, ESQ.

Teens know everything by the time they turn 18, right? Well, not exactly, but making the legal transition from child to adult has to happen sometime and 18 is the magic number. Even so, many teens are unaware of laws that apply to them once they blow out those special candles on their birthday cakes. In an effort to educate and enlighten this new group of grown-ups, the Washoe County Bar Association publishes *Now That You Are 18, A Survival Guide*. The guide tackles numerous subjects from landlord-tenant law to cyber bullying and sexting. The authors of the guide are Nevada lawyers who have donated their time and expertise to the cause of preparing kids to be adults.

Many of the attorneys who have written or revised articles for the guide work with the Washoe County Public Defender's Office. Deputy Public Defender Jennifer Rains starts off the guide with an article listing the new rights teens acquire at the age of majority, including the right to sue (and be sued) and the right to make or revoke a will. Chief Deputy Public Defender Maizie Pusich has two articles dealing with important subjects in the guide: *Crimes and Consequences* and *Guns and Other Weapons*. In *Crimes and Consequences*, teens learn that even having no knowledge that an act (such as agreeing to hold a stolen cell phone in their backpack for a friend) is illegal, they can still be convicted of a felony; ignorance of the law is no excuse. Another article authored by Maizie Pusich deals with typical teen behavior (such as throwing parties), and how this behavior can have new legal ramifications now that the teen is considered an adult. *Having Fun or Not?* also details the penalties for fraternity or sorority hazing and what can happen if an older teen is arrested for spray painting graffiti.

Not all of the survival guide's articles deal with teens and criminal behavior; there are many exciting events associated with becoming an adult. Eighteen year olds are on the brink of joining the full-time workforce and often supporting



themselves for the first time. But, as with any new endeavor, teens need to be educated about their new environment and may be unprepared for workplace issues such as on-the-job-injury, workplace discrimination or harassment. The article *Working and Taxes* tackles these topics and teaches teens solutions, rights and responsibilities as they begin to build their careers.

Other articles in the guide deal with powers that are new to 18 year olds, including the ability to enter into a contract and write checks. Deputy Public Defender Chris Fortier's *Money Matters* lists precautions teens should take when entering into a contract and examines what could happen if a teen breaks a contract because he or she didn't understand it. In *Consumer Protection*, Deputy Public Defender Christine Brady suggests recourses teens may have if they buy a new car with

their hard-earned dollars and the car breaks down the very next day. More articles written or revised by Washoe County public defenders include *Hate Crime in Nevada*, *Sex and the Law* and *Laws that Young Drivers Should Know*.

In addition to the time volunteered by many Washoe County Bar Association members, the guide was made possible by a grant from the State Bar of Nevada's Lawyer Referral and Information Service Program and from donations to the Washoe County Bar Foundation. The state bar's Young Lawyers Section distributes the guide in southern Nevada. It is the Washoe County Bar Association's hope that the guide will help teens make the important transition into adulthood with as few growing pains as possible. An interactive version of the guide can be found online at www.nowthatyouareeighteen.org. ■

Author's Biography on page 21.