



MY OPINION

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Small Projects Having a Big Impact

One of the Texas Young Lawyers Association's chief missions is public service. While we do this in numerous ways — several of our flagship efforts such as *Partnering for Pro Bono*, *Texas Lawyers for Texas Veterans*, and *R U Safe?* have been featured prominently in these pages and elsewhere — I want to call attention to several smaller projects that are having a big impact on Texans' lives.

Over the years, TYLA has created a library of booklets addressing a variety of legal topics of interest to Texas consumers, seniors, and families. These resources are available for free on the TYLA website (www.tyla.org) or by calling the TYLA office, and many of them are available in Spanish. Here is a sample of some of the recent and frequently requested materials:

- The *Tenants' Rights Handbook* is designed to help residential tenants better understand the rights and obligations involved in the landlord-tenant relationship. This was our most popular publication in 2010, with 7,741 downloads during the year.

- *How to Sue in Small Claims Court* provides an overview of the procedures for actions in small claims court. This handbook was originally published by TYLA in 1980 and has been updated five times over the years. It was downloaded 3,482 times in 2010.

- The *Pro Se Divorce Handbook* provides information for those representing themselves in a simple (uncontested) divorce, along with discussions about division of marital property and issues concerning children. Last year, 2,490 Texans requested copies of this publication.

- *Seniors and the Law: A Guide for Maturing Texans* was downloaded 2,143 times in 2010. This 28-page booklet is designed to help seniors understand the laws that affect their daily lives and become familiar with the benefits, special services, and resources available to them.

- *Protecting the Incapacitated: A Guide to Guardianship in Texas from Application to Oath* explains the basics of guardianship, as well as alternatives to guardianship. This pamphlet was downloaded 2,034 times in 2010.

- *Employment Law Basics for New Employers* was created in 2008 to help first-time employers understand the myriad state and federal statutes relating to the hiring, termination, and compensation of employees. This publication was downloaded 1,892 times in 2010.

- *To Will or Not to Will* is another longstanding TYLA publication, originally published in 1986 and updated last year for the eighth time. It covers what happens when a person dies with and without a will, including distribution of community and separate property, probate, estate administration, living wills, and powers of attorney. TYLA distributed 3,913 copies in 2010.

- The *Small Business Toolkit*, completed in 2010, is a 56-page booklet that provides an introduction to many of the legal issues affecting entrepreneurs and small business owners, including entity selection, contracts, and basic employment law.

- *Facing Foreclosure*, updated in 2010, provides an introduction to the residential foreclosure process and includes a list of resources for homeowners to consult for additional help. (See this month's *Client Page*, page 178.)

- *Special Education Laws and the School Environment: A Guide to Understanding Your Rights as a Parent* is a tool for parents of children with disabilities to help them understand the laws related to special education and obtain the resources they need. This publication was also updated in 2010.

- *Name Changes in Texas* was created in 2010 to explain the process of obtaining a name change in a proceeding separate from a marriage or divorce.

- *Expunctions in Texas* is another new publication that explains the process for expunging criminal convictions in Texas.

- *Consumer Bankruptcy*, created in 2010 with the help of the Young Lawyers Committee of the State Bar Bankruptcy Law Section, is a layperson's guide to understanding the personal bankruptcy process. This publication was downloaded 2,013 times in just a few months in 2010.

- *Introduction to Mechanics Liens*, also created in 2010, is a short pamphlet that explains the most important and basic aspects of Texas lien law.

These are just a few of the many TYLA publications available on our website. While these materials are not meant to be a substitute for legal advice, they provide sound introductions to important topics. Our hope is that they enable Texans to make better decisions and prevent legal problems from arising. If you have any comments on our current publications or suggestions for topics we haven't addressed, please let us know. You can contact TYLA at tyla@texasbar.com or by calling (800) 204-2222, ext. 1529. ★