

Our Legal Man

The Story of Shawn Newman

By Donald Cavanaugh

From the picture on his website, Shawn Newman could be your big brother, keeping his eye out for his little gay siblings; showing them the ropes of dealing with frightened parents, disapproving faith communities, the high school bullies, and more.

The effect is reinforced when you meet him in person. Tall, calm and confident, Newman comes across as soft spoken and gentle. He's extremely patient and explains the issues clearly, stopping for questions, probing the client's understanding, making sure there are no surprises.

Nevertheless, this gentleness belies a sharp mind, a persistent will and a conscientious compassion that asks the difficult questions today so you may avoid difficult consequences later on.

"Do you have a will?" he asks. "When was it last updated? How about powers of attorney? Civil union?" He doesn't pepper you with these questions. They are asked conversationally, but he wants to be sure you know what could happen to you and/or your survivors if you don't take steps now to avoid them.

"Most of us have heard the stories about gay couples that didn't make plans to protect joint assets and the deceased's family stepping in and claiming everything," he said. "Nothing is air tight but you have to be prepared to put up a good fight."

Newman was born a self-described "navy brat," in San Diego where his father was stationed. The family moved to Missouri where he grew up — he went to college at Missouri State University, earning a

bachelors of science degree. He got a masters of business administration (MBA) from Kent State and his doctorate of law from Widner University School of Law in Wilmington, Delaware.

"I was actually a late bloomer," said Newman. "I went back to school when I was 40 and studied law. I became a patent attorney and hated it. It was just a lot of sliding paper around and totally lacked any human interaction. So I decided to pursue the law that affects people's lives today and tomorrow."

He met his partner through friends in Delaware where they both worked for Dupont although they didn't know each other at the company. They registered with Dupont as domestic partners but soon found out how little that meant when Newman's partner needed knee surgery and Newman was denied family leave to care for him.

"That was when I realized I could do more with my law degree than paperwork," he said.

The couple moved to South Florida in 2008 and settled in Broward County. Newman opened his law firm in Wilton Manors. According to his website, he offers "service to individuals, life partners, traditional families, and small business owners in all aspects of estate planning and wealth preservation."

Newman sees himself as a simple family man.

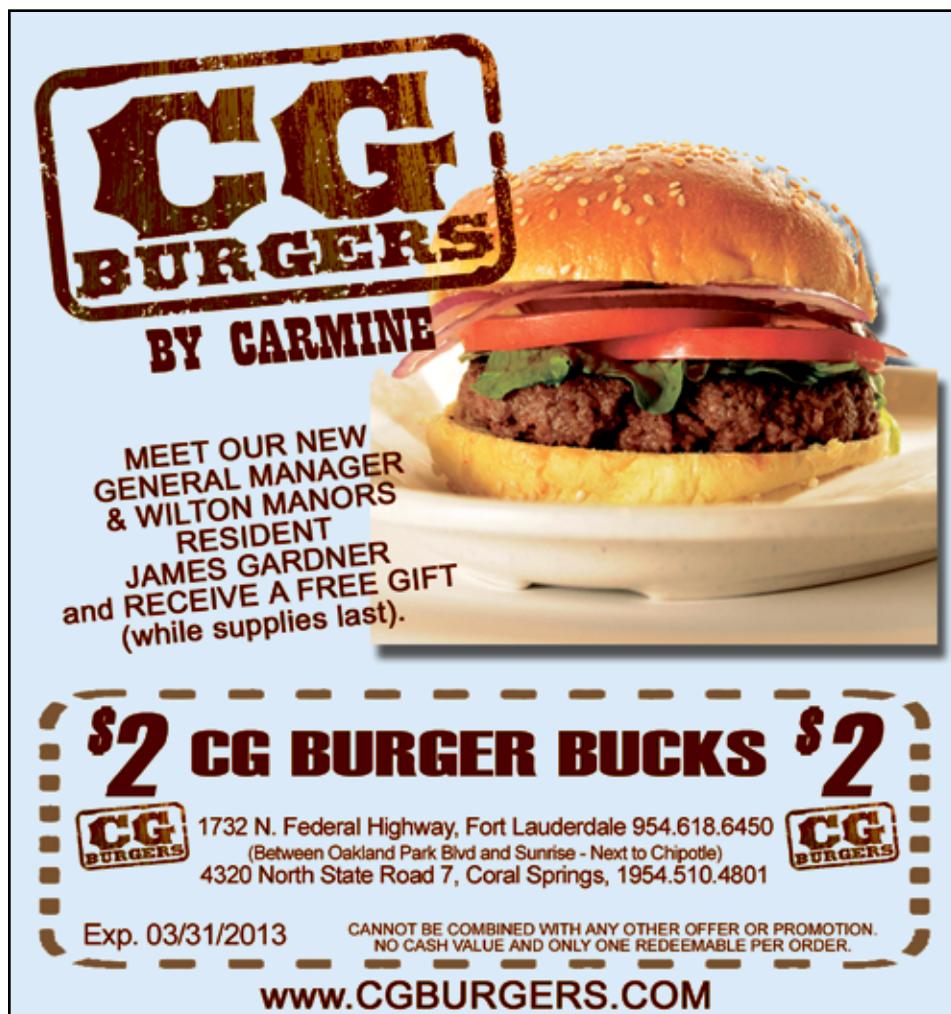
"Look," he said, "my partner and I are just Ozzie and Ozzie with a dog for a child. That's how we define our family. We've both been married before. We both came out in mid-life. We have kids and grandkids on my partner's side. Some family members on both sides are fine with us; some are not. We work with that just like everybody else."

Newman is a member of the

American Bar Association and the Broward County Bar Association. He's a member in good standing of the Florida, New Jersey and District of Columbia Bars. He offers his services to clients in Broward, Miami-Dade and Palm Beach.

Newman offers a free initial consultation and is available evenings and weekends, by appointment. If you or someone you know in Florida needs the assistance of an experienced Fort Lauderdale estate planning attorney, feel free to contact Newman at 954-563-9160

In the interest of full disclosure, I have become a client of Shawn's as a result of being asked to write this piece. As the reader can tell from the forgoing, I am very happy with Shawn's work. 



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