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VIEWPOINT

HENDERSON HOME NEWS | THE WEEK OF JANUARY 29-FEBRUARY 4, 2004

A View From Home TIM O'CALLAGHAN

Mothers On A Mission



Delise Sartini, Vicky Quinn, Monica Guinn, Cathy Black and Jill Fertitta are five mothers on a mission.

Earlier this week I was introduced to the group. What they didn't know is I was on similar trek.

For weeks I have been pondering over the fate of Sean Larimer. As you are probably aware, young Sean was the driver of the car in which his driving killed three of his best friends.

District Attorney David Roger and his deputies have come to the conclusion they need to make an example out of Sean. Not only should he carry the burden of his actions but the actions of many others before him and those to come. Roger wants to certify Sean as an adult where he could face 30 years in prison for felony DUI and manslaughter.

This is unthinkable! Sean should be punished but under the laws that were designed for juveniles.

Delise Sartini, unlike myself, has never met Sean or his parents. Unlike me, she hasn't seen the boys interact at school or play ball. Delise and Co. are far removed from any of the players and that is what makes their mission so pure. They are not anguished by personal history or knowledge.

They're disturbed by a dangerous precedent being set. A precedent, which if accepted, should immediately be appealed all the way to the Nevada Supreme Court. This is a debatable issue

Teens are so cavalier, untouchable and immortal. 'That won't happen to me' is a staple in teen lingo.

pitting friends and even family members against one another.

I am not convinced certifying Sean as an adult will make one iota of difference in preventing other teens from drinking and driving. Teens are so cavalier, untouchable and immortal. "That won't happen to me" is a staple in teen lingo.

How can we be sure our children won't get in the car with an impaired driver? We can't. We can only hope they use good judgment. At the same time even if they have not been drinking, are they willing to stand up against their friends?

The team of prosecutors have to deal with repeat offenders and thugs of every kind. It's my hope they rethink their position. Sean Larimer is not a thug; he is a good kid whose life swings in the hands of prosecutors.

Day in and day out the DA's office and its dedicated prosecutors deal with the deadliest of criminals who plan and carry out murder with no sense of remorse.

To this day I am haunted by the death of my 5-year-old friend more than 35 years ago in an un-maintained swimming pool. Recently this memory has been overshadowed by the images of Sean Larimer apologizing at three separate funerals for killing his friends.

His words echo in my head and hopefully in the mind of my own 16-year-old. If any good is to come out of this tragedy, it started with that boy and his words to the victims' families, friends and hundreds of other teens. It should be repeated again and again in every high school in Southern Nevada.

Delise is taking the right approach. Not only is she trying to preserve what is left of a child, but she intends on taking action to change laws and provide better education for young drivers.

Perhaps, 16 is not the appropriate age to be responsible for operating a motor vehicle. Being 16 has far too many consequences that have not been comprehended by young minds.

Sartini left me with a poignant statement so in turn I will give it to you:

"It is our goal as parents of teenagers to encourage the District Attorney's office to implement a fair and just punishment that remains in the Juvenile System and includes community service involving a public education component. Sean Larimer is coming home.

"You have to ask yourself do you want him to come home from a Juvenile Justice System that is equipped to educate, rehabilitate and punish appropriately?

"Or would you like him to come home from an Adult Prison system that will alienate, incarcerate and ultimately abuse what is left of this child."

You decide.

Tim O'Callaghan is publisher of the Henderson Home News. He can be reached at publisher@hbcjournal.com or 950-2656.

Young man hopes you'll learn from his irreversible mistake

■ **A penitent Sean Larimer seeks to educate UNLV students on the mortal consequences of drinking and driving**

By **MELISSA ROTHERMEL**
Staff Writer

It was a cold November night, nearly a year ago, when Sean Larimer drove after drinking alcohol and crashed his car, killing three of his childhood friends.

On Tuesday, Oct. 19, Larimer recited to UNLV students a speech he has now given 45 times—an oratory he hopes no one else will ever have to give. The 17-year-old discouraged drinking and driving by relaying and reliving the day his mistake killed his "three lifelong friends."

Sean Larimer is not much different from anyone else. He was born at Sunrise Hospital, not far from UNLV, on Aug. 29, 1987 to Susan and Gary Larimer. He has a younger brother named Kyle, who, when asked if he minded Sean speaking at his school earlier this year, said: "I'm not ashamed of my big brother." Until the accident, Larimer went to Green Valley High School. A video that was

shown before his speech showed snapshots of trips his family took to Disneyland and Lake Mead, and of him and his friends at school dances.

Larimer travels from school to school, giving speeches to students of all ages. These are the only times he is allowed to leave the Clark County Juvenile Detention Center.

He arrives at the schools in chains and can only have them off during his speech, and question-and-answer sessions.

"Where you really get to see Sean is when he answers questions," said Erin Breen, a representative of the UNLV Safe Community Partnership. She said the speech is memorized because it is a painful one to give. "We worked on it for two months," Breen said.

As soon as Larimer finishes answering questions, the chains go back on and he leaves with his probation officer.

Larimer gets a lot of feedback from the people to whom he speaks. Many



tell him he has touched their lives and they won't drink and drive over the weekend like they had planned. "Every time Sean gets that feedback, he gets a little piece of himself back," Breen said.

Larimer's speech is not intended to make him look like a hero; instead, it is intended to show the world that he is just like everybody else. No one is infallible, but Larimer wants to prevent people from making his mortal mistake.

On the night of Nov. 10, 2003, Larimer and his friends were having fun and goofing around. After leav-

ing one party, they went to another in the Seven Hills community. The house was full of loud teenagers. Noise complaints from the neighbors prompted the mother of the house, annoyed and at the end of her patience, to kick everyone out.

Larimer was the driver because he was the only one with a driver's license, a card that represented freedom to the boys. In Nevada, it is illegal for a driver to carry passengers for 60 days after receiving a driver's license. Larimer was on day 64.

Some 50 teenagers rode home from the party that night in undisturbed health. One car of teenagers did not. Larimer's vehicle crashed where Silver Springs Parkway curves, as his car continued going straight, only a half mile from the boys' destination.

Three teens—Travis Dunning, 15, Josh Parry, 15, and Kyle Poff, 16—died that night. An off-duty officer who heard the loud explosion of the crash rushed to the ruined car and

immediately attended to the boys. Larimer and his friend Cody Fredericks were saved, in part, to his timely aid.

There was also a police substation across the street. Larimer suffered from a coma, broken ribs and severe face damage. Nothing, however, hurt more than the guilt he felt and continues to feel today.

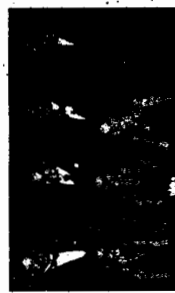
"I would do anything in this world to bring them back," he said, with tears in his eyes. He claimed that if God could remove him from this world to bring them back, he would accept it.

Larimer said he takes full responsibility for the accident that killed his friends. There was no peer pressure, he said.

"I picked up that first beer," Larimer said. "No one held a gun to my head and made me drink."

Larimer's alcohol level was .19.

See **DUI**, pg. 12



Courtesy Photo
Sean Larimer with Dunning, Parry and Poff before the fatal accident

more than twice the legal limit. He had not drunk alcohol more than five times in his life before the accident.

Larimer got out of the hospital four-and-a-half days later and returned to school. He knew he was going to be arrested, but he didn't know when. All he could do was wait. And miss his friends. He said he would call their cell phones just to hear their voices one more time. He would even catch himself automatically waiting for Dunning after class, only to have reality set in and remember that his friend wasn't coming.

Eventually, Henderson Police officers arrested him. Larimer accepted a plea bargain in February 2004, and as the then 16-year-old boy was led away in handcuffs, the only sound that echoed through the courtroom was his mother's sobs.

Larimer spends his days at the CC Juvenile Detention Center, where he is fulfilling his two-year sentence, which according to Breen is the most time any juvenile has gotten in the state of Nevada. He is not allowed to have any books in his room, but he is still working on his education. He still studies and takes tests. Because his term at the detention center is longer than that of anyone else, Larimer does not have many friends.

"I don't make any friends because they come and go," he said.

He will be released on Feb. 23, 2006.

This is only one instance, and unfortunately, there are many more

stories that end with lost lives. According to Sen. Barbara Cegaveste, R-Nev., car crashes are the number one killer for teens nationally. "It's a tragic thing that can be prevented," she said. "It's all preventable."

Cegaveste, with the help of Breen, is fighting to enact a graduated driver licensing bill that is already saving lives in 36 other states and Washington, D.C. "This is a public safety issue," she said. Cegaveste believes that it is her responsibility as a legislator to make a public policy "that will not only protect the young but also the public."

The bill would state that newly licensed drivers would have to drive a minimum of six months, remaining crash and conviction free, before they could have passengers under the age of 18, with the possible exception of immediate family members, in the car. Because of this, "you have to concentrate solely on your driving," Cegaveste said.

Before the driver's license is issued, the non-licensed driver would have to complete a 30-hour class and would need 50 hours—10 coming at night—of documented, supervised time behind the wheel with an instruction permit. The supervisor has to be at least 21 years old.

Travis Dunning's parents and Sean's mom are very supportive of the bill, Cegaveste said.

Larimer does not want people to feel sorry for him. "I hate jail," he said, "but I get to go home. My friends' parents have to see their kids in a grave. My friends' families have



Courtesy Photo



Courtesy Photo

Left: After his sentencing earlier this year, Sean Larimer and his mother are overwhelmed with emotion. Right: Parry, Poff and Dunning.

- In 2003, 182 people died in NV due to alcohol-related accidents
- In 2003, 17,013 died nationwide due to alcohol-related accidents
- In 2003, over 500,000 people were injured nationwide due to alcohol-related accidents
- Drivers between the ages of 21 and 24 were the most likely culprits of alcohol-related accidents, and were most likely to have blood alcohol levels exceeding .10

Statistics compiled by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

no more Thanksgivings and no more Christmases with their sons."

Rick Poff, father of the late Kyle Poff, often accompanies Larimer during his speeches. At his recent UNLV speech, Larimer's grandmother, Barbara Lacey, was with him instead. "Sean is a good boy," she said. "He's got a fabulous heart."

Lacey said she will go to the grave believing that Larimer crashed simply because he turned around to talk to his friends in the back seat at the exact moment the road made a bend. According to Larimer, his mother is the person who gets him through the day. Even though the experience has been difficult, Susan Larimer still holds strong that she is the lucky mom, Breen said.

According to Lacey, her daughter—Sean's mother—"cries every night for [the boys and their families]."

When released, Larimer will be on probation until he turns 21. He said he hopes to finish high school and said he will continue to give talks. As of now, he speaks primarily to younger Vegas valley students as part of his sentence of 600 community service hours. UNLV was his first speech at a college.

As part of his plea bargain, Larimer agreed not to contact the families of the boys involved in the accident. He said he hopes to rebuild the relationships he once had with those families who were like his own.

His final plea to students was this: "Please make different decisions than

The Forum

Sweet 16: Not for driving

Teen death rates call for drastic action

By Patrick Welsh

Two weeks ago, after a 16-year-old student at Churchill High School in Montgomery County, Md., was killed while driving from a party where alcohol was being served, parents met to discuss how to stop teen drinking and driving.

As well, mentioned as such, 10-15% may be they dodge the plain fact that the surest way to reduce the number of teen traffic deaths — nearly 8,000 last year — is to reduce the number of teens on the road. The best place to start is with 16-year-olds.

In the U.S., 16-year-olds have a crash rate five times greater than that of 18-year-olds. Although the driving experience of 16- and 18-year-olds has to be taken into account, immaturity plays an even bigger role, especially among boys. The immaturity factors so strong that, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, driver-education courses have had little or no effect on teen accidents.

Yet, in most states, teens are allowed to get a permit at 15 and all-licensed at 16. If the permit age were pushed up to 16, and if kids were required to hold the permit for a year before getting a license, there would be a substantial reduction in the deaths of teen drivers and their passengers. In England, the driving ages are 17 and 18. In Germany, it's 18. Both countries have lower teen-traffic deaths than the United States.

Even in the United States, raising the driving age to 17 would save 100 lives a year.

It's not just 16-year-olds who have come to see getting a license as a rite of passage. It's also the case that the more teens drive, the more they drink and drive.



But any responsible parent would gladly make that sacrifice to avoid the grief that will come last month when one of my students was killed as she rode with a 16-year-old driver whom police have charged with reckless driving. The 16-year-old driver had no license and was driving the best of friends' car.

Williams High School in Alexandria, Va., became the 15th teenager in the Washington Metropolitan area to be killed in a car crash in the last three years. Williams High School is a beautiful, National Merit semifinalist school. School powerhouses in the area had unlimited resources to protect their students.

hours after leaving my class on Friday, Oct. 15, that potential was snuffed out when the 16-year-old driver lost control of the Cadillac Escalade in which Laura was a front-seat passenger. Luckily, the driver and the five other teenage passengers in the SUV weren't seriously injured.

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety says that a key to curbing teen driving accidents is limiting the number of passengers a teen driver can have. According to AAA, when there is just one teenage passenger with a driver, the risk of a fatal crash doubles; it goes up fivefold when there are two or more passengers.

Passenger limits

The 16-year-old who was driving Laura and her friends was in violation of a law enacted in Virginia last year that says a driver 17 or younger may have only one passenger younger than 18 in a car for the first year the driver has a license. After the first year, the teen driver is restricted to three passengers until the age of 18.

Many parents I talked to didn't even know about the law, and from what I see with kids driving to and from school in cars jammed with other kids, the police don't seem to be enforcing it. Obviously, enforcement of passenger limits by parents and police has to increase. And on speeding, too.

Whether alone or with others, most teenage drivers put themselves at risk because of unrealistic attitudes toward speed. Which is a shame, because 75 percent of teen deaths

involve speeding. In fact, with the rising popularity of NASCAR and such movies as *The Fast and the Furious*, which have inspired a renewed interest in street racing, things may get much worse before they get better. From Virginia to California, there are a growing number of teenage boys adding nitrous fuel systems and modified air intake systems to their cars to get them to hit absolute maximum speed. Street racing has posed such a problem in San Diego — 16 deaths and 31 serious injuries in 2002 — that a retired professor of public health at San Diego State University founded RaceLegal, an organization that sponsors street-legal racing under controlled conditions at Qualcomm Stadium.

Ironically, speed may be the danger that parents can control most easily. There are many new GPS car-tracking devices that can inform parents where, how far and how fast kids are driving. Most tracking systems can be purchased for about \$300.

It's known that kids will be outraged if the driving age is raised, the passenger limits enforced and their speeding tendencies tracked by parents.

But when it comes to cars — the biggest source of death for American teens — parents have an obligation to protect their kids and to do everything to save them from these threats.

Patrick Welsh, an English teacher at Williams High School in Alexandria, Va., is a member of the National Transportation Safety Board.

SundayMorning

COMING MONDAY

Will proposed casino choke beltway?

Trio latest martyrs in 'graduated licensing' cause

Their names were Travis Dunning, Josh Parry and Kyle Poff, a trio of baby-faced 15-year-olds who died when a car driven by their 16-year-old buddy Sean Larimer slammed into a wall in Henderson after midnight Monday.

And they'll probably end up the newest martyrs in the war to toughen Nevada's teenage licensing laws, though trios of maimed teens haven't changed much in the Silver State as of late.

Earlier this year, the names were Natasha Keeter, Ashley Troester and Ashley Biersach, and the story was how Keeter, 17, and Troester, 16, lost their lives and Biersach, then 16, lost part of her right leg after Troester wrapped her teen-packed car around a light pole in 2002.

That prompted Barbara Cegavske, a state senator from Las Vegas, to go to Carson City hoping to expand "graduated licensing" requirements that delay teens from getting full driving privileges until they've had some time behind the wheel.

Cegavske's measure, Senate Bill 256, would have barred drivers age 17 and under from carrying unrelated passengers under 18 for the first six months they were licensed. Under current Nevada law, a 16-year-old must wait just 60 days before their pals can ride shotgun. The bill would have also required 10 hours of supervised night driving experience.

But after sailing through the Senate on a 20-1 vote in April, the bill died in the Assembly's Transportation Committee in May.

A transcript of the committee's deliberations on May 13 shows there was some hair-splitting about the words "shall" and "may." Someone made a clarification over a semicolon. And — oh, yeah — they talked about kids and death and saving lives. In the end, there was a call for more information and a polite thanks-much-let's-move-along from the committee, but no vote.

Senators and Assembly members went on. Larimer got into a car with his buddies and his car hit that wall. On the day of the crash, Larimer had been a fully licensed driver for all of 65 days. And now the names Cegavske will take to Carson City next session will be Dunning, Parry and Poff.



Omar Sofradzija
ROAD WARRIOR



Travis Dunning



Josh Parry



Kyle Poff

Sadly, researchers rank the question, "Does graduated licensing work?" right next to, "Is the world round?" The

short answer is yes, and the issue was put to rest long ago. But not in Nevada.

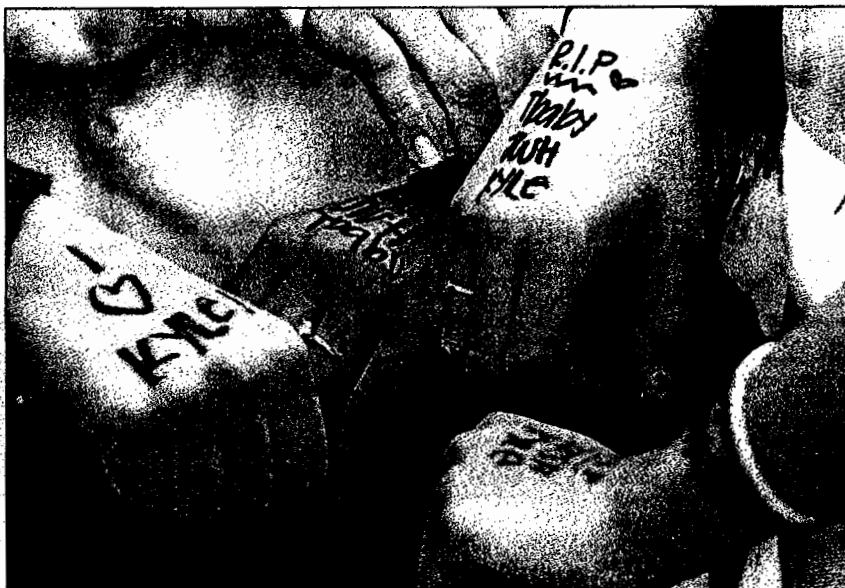
"I'm not aware of any research that shows any sort of negative consequences of graduated licensing," said David Willis, director of the Center for Transportation Safety at the Texas Transportation Institute at Texas A&M University. "It's been remarkably effective."

Experts say giving 16-year-olds free rein behind the wheel is like tossing toddlers into Olympic-sized swimming pools and waving good-bye. It's better to first let them wade in the kiddie pool, much like graduated licensing allows for a gradual widening of freedom as experience grows and abilities are demonstrated.

A good thing, since 16-year-olds are statistically the most dangerous drivers on the road, besting 85-year-olds.

"Easing young drivers onto the roadways by controlling their exposure to progressively more difficult driving experiences can reduce the incidence of traffic crashes involving young drivers," the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said in its "Traffic Safety Facts" report in May.

Studies in a number of



JOHN GURZINSKI/REVIEW-JOURNAL

Names and nicknames of three teens killed in a Monday accident adorn the hands of friends who huddled at a memorial for Travis Dunning, Josh Parry and Kyle Poff in Henderson last week.

Southbound U.S. Highway 93/95 between Lake Mead Parkway and Horizon Drive



may have lane reductions from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. daily through Friday morning.

Lake Mead Parkway between Stephanie Street and Reserve Boulevard may have lane reductions from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. today to Friday morning through the end of this month.

states and Canada found the number of crashes involving drivers ages 16 or 17 drop anywhere from 5 percent to 31 percent after the institution of graduated driving laws, which now meet traffic safety administration standards in 34 states, according to the agency.

Of course, laws only work if people follow them, and that's not always the case. Ryan Sneed, 16, had his license for just nine days when his sport utility vehicle ran into a truck, killing him and injuring four teens riding with him last year. Under existing law, Sneed shouldn't have had any teens with him in the SUV.

Assembly Transportation Committee Chairwoman Vonne Chowning of North Las Vegas said she fears a crackdown would just hurt law-abiding teens. "What's next? Do we make it that a teenager has a year of driving before they can carry other teens? Ninety-nine percent of kids driving follow all of the rules."

Willis said it's not a question of following the rules. It's one of drivers lacking the experience to handle all but basic driving duties to start out. "If you look at teenaged crash rates, there is an incredibly large amount of teens who have a crash in the first six months of driving ... it's not just bad kids," he said.

Indeed, one study found almost six of every 100 teen drivers had an accident in their first month of driving, and Canadian research discovered that teen driver accident rates in their first month is almost twice that of their sixth month, according to the Insurance Institute of Highway Safety.

Willis acknowledges teen

driving restrictions have faced complaints from "parents tired of being chauffeurs. That's why we license kids at 16 or younger ... we're willing to live with the trade-off of increased mobility and decreased safety."

But with graduated licensing, "you help the mobility along, but in a rational sort of way." And "it gives backbone to parents" who have to endure the pleas of their children wanting to run a late-night shuttle. "Now they can say with conviction, 'It's illegal.'"

Cegavske hopes she can get a bill passed before there are any more young names to tote to the capital.

"I just keep seeing these kids in the paper. It just doesn't stop," she said. "I just wish I could touch every parent and explain to them why this is so important. All we're trying to do is save lives."

If you have a question, tip or trade, call the Road Warrior at 387-2904, or e-mail him at roadwarrior@reviewjournal.com or OSofradzija@reviewjournal.com. Please include your phone number.

WHERE NEWS COMES FIRST

EVERETT LAS VEGAS

Keep up with last-minute traffic troubles before you hit the road.

Watch Tom Hoadley every weekday morning and afternoon on News 2.

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Graduated Driver's License Program

By Tyler Quillin
Sophomore

Bishop Gorman
The Lance
October 2004-Issue 2

The number one killer of teens is car crashes, and it isn't drugs or drinking that is causing them. It is inexperience behind the wheel.

Sixteen and seventeen year-olds make up 1.9 percent of Nevada's drivers but are involved in 7.2 percent of fatal crashes and 14 percent of injury crashes. The crash rate per capita for 16 year-olds has decreased by about one third since states have started implementing Graduated License Programs in 1996.

Nevada State Senator Barbara Cegavske is working on a bill to establish a Graduated Driver's License Program in our state. In an effort to keep our streets and public safer, Senator Cegavske has been working on this bill since 1997. "Driving is a privilege, not a right," says Senator Cegavske.

The whole concept of a Graduated License Program

is to phase new drivers into feeling comfortable and safe behind the wheel. Nevada can significantly reduce the number of car crashes that involve 16 year-olds by adding provisions that are proposed in Senator Cegavske's legislative bill.

Senator Cegavske wants to set up a three phase Graduated License System in Nevada. This system is like many in other states. Forty-six states and the District of Columbia have initiated at least one stage of the Graduated Licensing Program. Senator Cegavske's Graduated Licensing bill will set a minimum of six months with an instructional permit. Her bill will set passenger restrictions on drivers anywhere from 16 years of age and 3 months to 17 years of age. This system will have night and passenger restrictions until 18 years of age. The bill will also set the age for a full driver's license, without any restrictions, at 18 years of age.

This does seem like a lot, but it is in the best interest for our teens and the public safety. Right now, Nevada has a program that allows a teen of 15 years of age and six months to get an instructional permit. At this point, the driver only has to hold this permit for 90 days until they can get their license. Then they have their license with only a passenger restriction for three months. Is this safe for our teens? Throwing them on the roads at such a young age? Senator Cegavske

says, "As a parent and a senator, I truly believe that this is an important public safety issue." Senator Cegavske feels so strongly about this bill because she herself is a mother, and she has seen the devastating facts that keep increasing and increasing year by year. Twenty-two 16 to 17 year-old drivers were killed in 2002 in Nevada; thirteen of those were in Clark

County. Eighty percent of Nevada's teens killed in 2003 weren't wearing seat belts. There were 48,438 crashes reported to Metro last year and 950 were teen related.

Youthful inexperienced drivers are swarming the streets of Nevada and America. Driving has been established as a milestone in a society of teenagers who are in a rush to "grow-up." This unacceptable and this must be changed. Getting our teens driving should be a well-rounded process where schools, parents, and the teens help to make the best driver possible. Remember, you're who has to drive on the roads with them.

Good luck with your bill in the next state legislative session, Senator Cegavske!

NEVADA STATE SENATOR BARBARA CEGAVSKE is working on a bill to establish a Graduated Driver's License Program in our state.

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