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Girl Scouts find Saturday reception anything but chilly

By JENNIFER ALEXANDER *Special to the Tribune-Herald*

Snow, sleet, ice and an anti-abortion boycott didn't keep local Girl Scout troops from selling cookies at Waco shopping outlets Saturday.

Troop mother and Waco resident Lisa Weaver, one of those braving Saturday's wintry conditions, said customers "have been real supportive" — a typical reaction by many troop officials out and about town.

Weaver, who helped several girls from Girl Scout Troop 7244 sell cookies in the Parkdale Shopping Center, said they had been doing well in the half-hour they had been at the site.

"They feel sorry for us," 12-year-old Girl Scout member Kara said of customers.

Weaver said the girls were even treated to a Valentine's Day song by a singing quartet that stopped by.

Although frigid weather seemed a more immediate threat, troop officials had worried about what Girl Scouts might face while mounting their annual cookie drive this weekend.

In a Christian radio spot, Baylor professor John Pisciotta urged listeners to abstain from buying Girl Scout cookies because of the Bluebonnet Council's ties to Planned Parenthood, which, among other things, provides abortion services.

Along with about two dozen other organizations, including the Waco Tribune-Herald, the Bluebonnet Council has also co-sponsored a sex-education program organized by Planned Parenthood. Pisciotta and other activists have objected to the subjects taught at the program.

Pisciotta said he was particularly irked when, last spring, the Bluebonnet Council honored Planned Parenthood executive director Pam Smallwood as a "Woman of Distinction."

The Bluebonnet Council is chartered by Girl Scouts of the USA and serves about 6,000 girls in Bell, Bosque, Brazos, Coryell, Falls, Freestone, Grimes, Hill, Leon, Limestone, Madison, McLennan, Robertson and part of Burleson counties.

While council executive director Beth Vivio has expressed concern that anti-abortion activists might confront Girl Scouts about the controversial issue, cookie sales went on without incident Saturday.

Troop leader Janice Vonasek, of Chalk Bluff, has three daughters in three troops, all of whom helped sell cookies at Wal-Mart Supercenter in Bellmead Saturday.

In two hours, Vonasek said, the girls sold about 20 cases of cookies. Each case contains a dozen boxes.

"We've had no negative comments," she said.

Although Pisciotta, a spokesman for Pro-Life Waco, mounted the boycott, other Waco anti-abortion leaders announced support for his effort, if

only to convince the leadership of the Girl Scouts' Bluebonnet Council to sever ties with Planned Parenthood.

Rick Ellis, leader of Waco Right to Life, has said he is sorry Girl Scouts must suffer because their leaders continue to associate with an agency that provides abortions.

"Hitting them in the pocketbook is a pretty common technique these days," Ellis said of the idea behind a Girl Scout cookie boycott.

But if the council's pocketbook remains the target, Saturday sales by Troop 7500 suggest the boycott missed its mark. Girls from Waco and Woodway took orders for between 400 and 600 boxes, and sold several dozen more in an hour of sales at the Franklin Avenue Wal-Mart Supercenter.

Troop leader Becky Parker said people have been nice to the girls, even buying cookies when they might normally have skipped such purchases.

"We had one man come up to us and say, 'I don't normally buy cookies but I'm going to because y'all have gotten a bad rap,'" Parker said. "Sometimes we get donations, and we're giving some boxes to Compassion Ministries."

The girls said they were having a "great time" selling cookies. When asked what they would do with the money they raised, 9-year-old Madison said: "We're going to camp!"