

THE CONCRETE COALITION

CEMENTED CONVICTIONS: Construction-business owner Chris Danze has convinced every cement company within 60 miles to refuse to lay the foundation for Planned Parenthood's new Austin, Texas, abortion clinic.



hometown heroes

Construction workers in central Texas have found a unique way to obstruct Planned Parenthood.

by Candi Cushman

It would be difficult to find a more dedicated pro-life activist than construction-company owner Chris Danze. The 48-year-old Austin, Texas, resident has spent the last two decades holding candlelight-prayer vigils at abortion clinics and picketing the state Capitol. He's also helped build a maternity home and welcomed pregnant foster-care teens into his family of six.

But for most of his life, Danze kept his pro-life activities separate from his career—until this fall, when he discovered a new tool for protecting the preborn among his construction wares: concrete.

As *Citizen* went to press, he and his business partners were turning this mixture of gravel, cement and water into a potent weapon for defeating Planned Parenthood—and awakening their community to the brutality of abortion.

It all started when the Planned Parenthood/Texas Capital Region (PPTCR) decided to build an abortion clinic just 15 minutes from Danze's office.

For years, PPTCR had been forced to refer some 2,000 abortion clients a year to competitors—thanks to landlords who included prohibitions against abortion in storefront leases. So the organization recruited private donations to construct its own “reproductive services” center.

Capping a two-year fundraising campaign (dubbed “The Choice Project”), the PPTCR held a groundbreaking ceremony in September, unveiling

plans for a \$6.2 million abortion and “education” center. The doors were scheduled to open by fall 2004.

The so-called flagship facility has been billed as Planned Parenthood's first abortion clinic in central Texas and the largest in 10 counties.

Hardhats united

As Danze observed the groundbreaking festivities alongside other protesters waving “death camp” signs, he realized it would take more than picketing to stop this latest war on those in the womb. So he took a life-changing step:

“I sent a letter to all of my suppliers—of concrete, steel, wood—and told them that if I saw their trucks on this project, we would no longer do work with them.”

He's not worried about the ramifications, Danze told *Citizen*, because it's his constitutional right to choose business associates. And he bases *his* right to choose on biblical principle:

“The Gospel of Jesus Christ clearly delineates where we should be on this issue: We should be defending ‘the least’ of our brothers and sisters. And if these [preborn] children aren't the least, then who among us is?”

Individual conviction quickly snowballed into a citywide movement. Many of the suppliers who received Danze's letter recommended the same action to their colleagues—and within a few weeks, every concrete business within 60 miles had committed to

Activist: Chris Danze**Company:** Maldondo and Danze, Inc.**Wife:** Sheri, coordinator of The Gabriel Project, a parish-level outreach to women in crisis pregnancies**Children:** Four, ages 19 to 25, plus one 16-year-old foster child.

boycott the Planned Parenthood job.

That's a key victory because "if somebody can't get to the [construction] job within an hour or so, it almost becomes impossible to pour the concrete," explained Mark Hamilton of Rainbow Materials, one of the first businesses to join the protest.

Creating a "firewall of concrete suppliers" will prevent Planned Parenthood from laying its foundation, Danze added. "But if that firewall is breached, we'll just continue doing whatever we can to slow [construction] down and make it more expensive."

To that end, he and about a dozen boycott leaders formed the Austin Area Pro-Life Concrete Contractor and Supplier Association. Expanding on Danze's initial efforts, the association sent another letter by certified mail to 750 CEOs of construction and building-supply companies in Austin and San Antonio.

"We respectfully request your organization [to] consider declining invitations to supply materials ... or provide services for construction of the [Planned Parenthood] buildings," said the letter, signed by 88 business owners and local residents.

One copy was hand-delivered to James C. Browning, president of Browning Construction—the San Antonio-based company that was overseeing the Planned Parenthood "Choice Project."

Creating accountability

Browning didn't return *Citizen's* repeated phone calls; his secretary said he was "out ill." But his company's Web site says he serves on Christ Episcopal Church's governing board and is a former chairman of St. Luke's Episcopal School. A family-run business founded in the 1930s, Browning Construction lauds itself as a leader of the industry "built on integrity." An online portfolio lists dozens of churches and hospitals it's built.

In yet another letter mailed to more than 1,000 area churches in October, Danze recounted a phone conversation he had with James Browning.

"I told him I loved him as a brother in the faith," the letter said. "I told him I had no animosity toward him or his company. However, what Planned Parenthood was building was detrimental

to families. ... He listened attentively, but said very little. I quoted Scripture: 'What does it profit a man to gain the whole world but lose his soul?' This was the only thing ... that he really reacted to. He said, 'uh-huh.'"

Apparently, Browning was listening more than he let on. Six weeks after the boycott began, his company halted work on the abortion facility on Nov. 4. "We have requested that the construction contract be terminated because we are unable to secure and retain adequate ... suppliers to complete the project in a timely manner," a company statement said. Since Browning is one of the state's largest construction companies, its decision was reported by CNN and the Associated Press.

Frazzled Planned Parenthood representatives responded by accusing construction workers of "conducting a campaign of harassment and intimidation."

But Danze wasn't distracted; he only paused to proclaim "glory to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit"—and then pledged to continue holding other builders accountable.

"When they knowingly facilitate an abortion clinic to continue wounding women and killing children, they are culpable," he said. "If they don't know what they're working on, that's different. But see, that's my mission—to let everybody know what they're working on and not let them get away with saying, 'Well, I was ignorant.'"

To complete that mission, Danze and Co. are continually monitoring Planned Parenthood's construction site, using CBs and mobile phones to alert each other when new vendors arrive.

"When a delivery truck ... dropped off some lumber," Danze told *Citizen*, "I showed him a picture of a baby that had been killed by abortion. 'This is what they're going to do here,' I said. 'Go back to your boss and show him this picture ... and ask [him] to please not participate.'"

"We're going to do that through the whole project ... day in and day out, monitoring who comes in and praying in front of the building."

In addition to Browning, they've per-

sueded plumbers, air-conditioning suppliers, dirt haulers, steel providers and even a portable toilet company to withhold services, Danze said. Every company that pulls off the job receives a thank-you call or note.

The construction industry's dependence on relationships between suppliers and builders have aided those efforts. In a depressed building market, companies know it's risky to offend their suppliers.

"[Our] industry is a fairly conservative group," Danze said. "I'd say it's probably 70 percent pro-life."

Meanwhile, Planned Parenthood has vowed that its construction will continue. "We will get it done," spokeswoman Danielle Tierney told reporters.

But even if PPTCR completes its "death camp," Danze said, "we are not going to stop with construction. We are going to identify [other suppliers] who service the copy machine, do the janitorial service, do the pest control."

Just as it requires a mixture of two very different ingredients—gravel and water—bonded with cement to make a firm, concrete foundation, this experience has taught Danze that it takes a mixture of two things he formerly kept separate—biblical principles and business relationships—bonded with faith to create effective Christian activism.

"You can't just leave the gospel on the shelf when you walk out of church," he said. "You have to take it to the marketplace. That's what we need to be doing. Otherwise, we cannot reform this culture of death." ●

WHO TO CONTACT: Thank James C. Browning, president of Browning Construction, for stopping work on Planned Parenthood's abortion center. Address: 903 Basse Rd., San Antonio, TX 78212; phone 210-736-1701; e-mail jcbrowning@browningconstruction.com

Also encourage Chris Danze at the Austin Area Pro-Life Concrete Contractor and Supplier Association. Address: 3300 Bee Cave Rd.; Ste. 650, #183, Austin, TX 78746; e-mail cdanze@austin.rr.com