

Pro-life forces boycotting Girl Scout cookies

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By CINDY V. CULP and TERRI JO RYAN

Tribune-Herald staff writers

A local Christian radio station is airing "public service announcements" urging listeners to abstain from Girl Scout cookies because of an area troop's link with Planned Parenthood activities.

KBDE-FM manager Bill Thrasher said the spot is not meant to negatively impact the annual Bluebonnet Girl Scout Council fundraiser, only to convince troop leadership to distance itself from Planned Parenthood and its pro-choice agenda.

The spots, which Thrasher said began airing Wednesday, were denounced by Pam Smallwood, executive director of Planned Parenthood of Central Texas.

"It incenses me that anybody would condemn the Girl Scouts, for crying out loud," she said. "It's a fabulous organization that has done tremendous things worldwide in terms of helping boost girls' self-esteem. I cannot think of a more noble mission."

Beth Vivio, executive director of the Bluebonnet Council, expressed concern for individual Girl Scouts who, while trying to sell cookies, might be exposed to graphic tirades from pro-life activists about abortion.

"We hope they will not approach Girl Scouts, young girls, and try to speak to them about this because, certainly, the girls would not understand what they're talking about, the context of it," Vivio said.

In the spot, Baylor University economics professor and pro-life activist John Pisciotta urges listeners "to join me in abstaining from Girl Scout cookies" because of "the close connection between the Bluebonnet Council and Planned Parenthood."

He cites as evidence the troop's co-sponsorship of Planned Parenthood's "Nobody's Fool," an annual sex-education program whose topics last year included dating, sexually transmitted diseases, abstinence and pregnancy prevention.

"The cozy relationship was further revealed last May when the Bluebonnet Council honored Pam Smallwood as a Woman of Distinction," Pisciotta says in the radio spot. "Smallwood is the chief executive of Planned Parenthood's Waco abortion clinic."

Pisciotta, a Catholic layman and spokesman for Pro-Life Waco, also criticized Planned Parenthood's distribution of a sex-education booklet, *It's Perfectly Normal*, presented to students in grades seven through nine during last July's Nobody's Fool event.

"The book is an assault on Christian morality," Pisciotta told the *Tribune-Herald*. "I expect the Girl Scouts to uphold a higher standard of decency."

He said he finds the Bluebonnet Council's involvement in sex education odd.

"I don't think there is (another) Girl Scout council in the country doing this," he said.

Vivio said Pisciotta contacted her last spring when it was announced Smallwood would be receiving the honor. He asked the council not to honor her, she said.

Since then, the council had not heard from Pisciotta until recently, when he decided to launch a boycott of Girl Scout cookies.

"I don't know why he's decided to start this up again," Vivio told the *Tribune-Herald*. "Nobody's Fool was in July and the Women of Distinction Award banquet was in April, so both events are in the past."

Vivio said Pisciotta has also apparently urged people to contact the council about the issue. Her office has received "a fair number" of calls and e-mails about the situation this week.

A few of the council's volunteers have expressed concern over its relationship with Planned Parenthood, Vivio said. But, to her knowledge, no Girl Scout or her troop has decided not to sell cookies because of the boycott.

Vivio, who said the Bluebonnet Council did not provide funding for the Nobody's Fool event, said the council's board would discuss its affiliation with Planned Parenthood in March.

Texas has 19 Girl Scout councils. The Bluebonnet Council serves about 6,000 girls in Bell, Bosque, Brazos, Coryell, Falls, Freestone, Grimes, Hill, Leon, Limestone, Madison, McLennan, Robertson and part of Burleson counties. It is headquartered in Waco.

Rick Ellis, leader of Waco Right to Life, voiced support for Pisciotta's effort.

"I'm sorry that the girls may have to suffer a while for what their leaders have done," he said. "But if someone's involved with Planned Parenthood, we don't need to be involved with them."

Ellis said he is looking for Bluebonnet Council leaders to "recant" their association with the Nobody's Fool event and other ventures with Planned Parenthood of Central Texas.

If people are aware of that linkage, he said, they can't "in good conscience" buy the cookies.

"Hitting them in the pocketbook is a pretty common technique these days," he added.

Smallwood, often the target of criticism by Central Texas pro-life activists, lamented that the Girl Scouts were singled out for blame.

"To think that anybody would fault them is low," she said. "It makes me very angry."

However, Smallwood said she has a hunch the boycott may instead end up giving the council a boost.

"I think this will cause many people to go buy more (cookies)," Smallwood said.

Cindy V. Culp can be reached at cculp@wacotrib.com or 757-5744.
Terri Jo Ryan can be reached at tjryan@wacotrib.com or 757-5746