

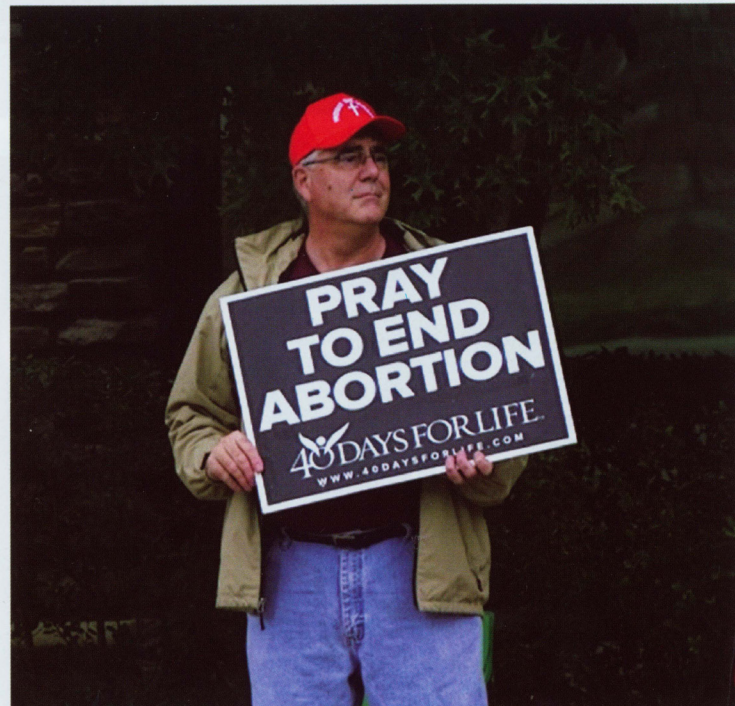
Planned Parenthood has attempted to overcome a lack of community support by flexing its financial muscle, opening a new \$4.3 million, 9,000 square foot abortion complex just 11 days after the conclusion of last fall's 40 Days for Life campaign. The building project was designed to create obstacles for 40 Days for Life participants and sidewalk counselors. Not only did Planned Parenthood erect an eight-foot fence around the property, it also removed the public sidewalk.

Pisciotta is adamant that babies can be saved even without a sidewalk. "I'm not at all discouraged by this," Pisciotta said. "It shows that Planned Parenthood is disoriented, and they don't understand the challenge they face in Central Texas."

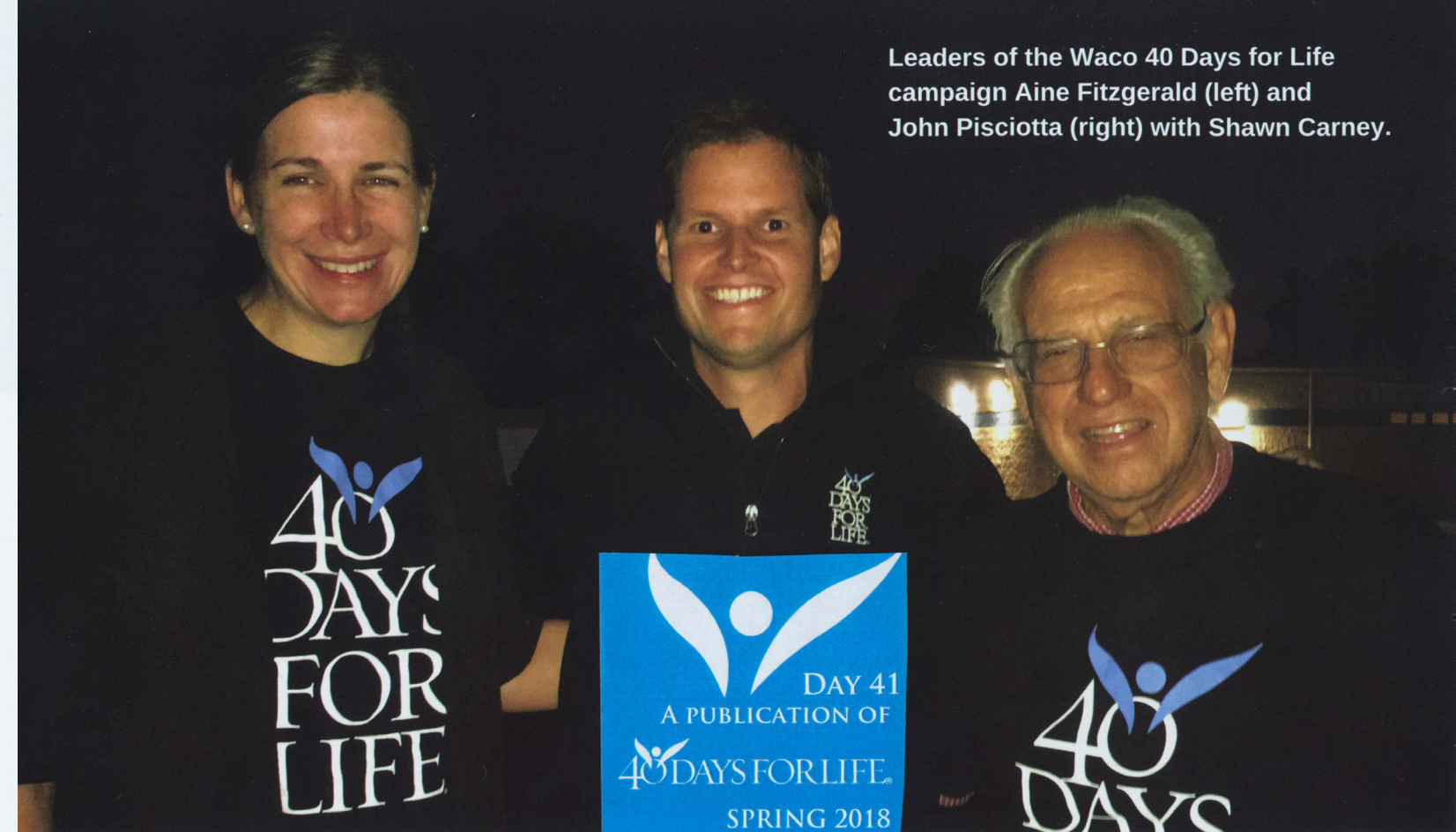
Pisciotta and Fitzgerald initially planned to host their next 40 Days for Life campaign in September. But with the new facility opening, they simply couldn't wait. When applications to lead the spring campaign from February 14 to March 25 opened, Waco was one of the first cities on board.

"I'm confident pastors and churches in the city will increasingly step forward to say 'no' to the shedding of innocent blood in our midst," Pisciotta said.

Certainly, Pisciotta, Fitzgerald and the pro-life community would have preferred that abortions never resumed in Waco. But after more than two decades of defending life through many ups and downs, they're committed to fight for life as long as it takes, one saved baby at a time.



Leaders of the Waco 40 Days for Life campaign Aine Fitzgerald (left) and John Pisciotta (right) with Shawn Carney.



FORTITUDE AND FAITH DEEP IN THE HEART OF TEXAS

*Why a Baylor economics professor
won't leave Planned Parenthood alone*

By Steve Karlen

**"I WOULDN'T
CARE IF IT WAS
5 YEARS OLD.
I'M GOING
TO KILL IT."**

"Do you know this is abortion day?" asked Rev. Ronnie Holmes, pastor of Church of the Open Door in Waco, Texas. It was day one of Waco's first 40 Days for Life vigil in more than three years, and a woman had just pulled into Planned Parenthood's parking lot.

"Yes, I'm here to get one," the woman replied defiantly, even pumping her first into the air to punctuate her enthusiasm.

Holmes, a veteran sidewalk counselor for more than a decade, was undeterred in his efforts to save this mother and baby from abortion. "I urge you to reconsider," he said. "A baby's heartbeat can be heard three weeks after conception."

Her callous response shocked vigil participants and even made front-page news in the Waco Tribune Herald: "I wouldn't care if it was 5 years old. I'm going to kill it."

Such a troubling encounter was a difficult way to begin a 40 Days for Life vigil, to say the least. But by the end of the day, the broken-hearted prayer warriors found reason to celebrate.

An out-of-town woman who recently learned she was pregnant arrived at Planned Parenthood with instructions to "take care of it." But efforts to pressure this young mom into an abortion hit a snag when the abortion provider demanded money just to perform an ultrasound.



When they did my ultrasound, my baby was dancing! I knew...I was not going to have an abortion... Thank you to the people on the sidewalk in the 40 Days for Life shirts and signs. You saved my baby!

"I didn't have any money," she said. "I started crying and walked outside, and that's when a man on the sidewalk asked me to come talk to him and to pray. He introduced me to a nurse from Care Net. I didn't have a ride, and the nurse offered to take me to Care Net to get an ultrasound and to talk about my decision."

Meeting her baby on the ultrasound machine screen changed everything.

"When they did my ultrasound, my baby was dancing! I knew...I was not going to have an abortion," she said, adding that Care Net "told me they had built a house just for me and took me to see it. I couldn't stop laughing and crying all at the same time. I am so happy that I get to have my baby and build a life for us. Thank you to the people on the sidewalk in the 40 Days for Life shirts and signs. You saved my baby!"

The day-one emotional roller coaster ride taken by Waco's 40 Days for Life team is something of a microcosm for a quarter century of ups and downs experienced by local pro-life activists. Planned Parenthood opened its Waco abortion facility in January of 1994. Two years later, pro-lifers responded by establishing Pro-Life Waco, the organization that now hosts 40 Days for Life locally.

Pro-Life Waco Director John Pisciotta said Planned Parenthood performed more than 19,000 abortions from 1994 through 2013. Amidst the tragic loss of life, however, 40 Days for Life prayer vigils as well as ongoing public witness and sidewalk counseling

efforts have shone a light in the darkness, saving lives and empowering mothers in crisis.

"Our primary goal was to turn abortion-minded moms to a decision for life," Pisciotta said. "We were blessed with 'turnarounds' every month. Women were led to Care Net Pregnancy Center of Central Texas for help."

After years of saving lives on the streets, the biggest victory of all came in 2013. After seven 40 Days for Life campaigns, newly passed state-level health and safety regulations forced an end to abortion in Waco.

Finally, pre-born children and mothers in Waco would be safe from abortion. Pro-lifers capped nearly two decades worth of activism with a celebration event at Church of the Open Door.

In 2016, however, the United States Supreme Court struck down major provisions of the Texas abortion facility regulation law. By the end of the year, Planned Parenthood had once again obtained a license to perform abortions in Waco. In April of 2017, the abortion giant resumed ending the lives of pre-born children for the first time in nearly four years.

The Texas abortion facility law shuttered abortion centers across Texas. Nearly two years later, many of those facilities remain closed. So why did Planned Parenthood fast-track abortions in Waco once the state regulations were struck down—particularly with such a vibrant pro-life presence in town?

Unlike many of the abortion facilities impacted by the Texas law, Waco's Planned Parenthood remained open as an abortion referral center. Waco is also home to Baylor University, and college towns are hot markets for the abortion industry. Furthermore, Pisciotta noted that with its location on a main interstate between Austin and Dallas-Fort Worth and nearly 100 miles away from the nearest abortion center, "Waco could become an abortion magnet for dozens of counties east and west of Interstate 35."

In response to Planned Parenthood providing abortions once again, Pisciotta tasked his Pro-Life Waco colleague, Aine Fitzgerald, with organizing the fall 40 Days for Life campaign. You could say she hit the ground running. While most 40 Days for Life launch events take place in late September—right before the vigil starts—Fitzgerald and Pisciotta wanted to build momentum early. So they hosted 40 Days for Life President Shawn Carney and former Planned Parenthood manager-turned-local 40 Days for Life leader Sue Thayer for a mid-June kickoff rally.

The fast start paid off. By day one, 100 pro-lifers had already pledged to pray on the sidewalk in front of Planned Parenthood. That number would increase sharply following an intensive community outreach blitz featuring radio ads, billboards, yard signs, 40 Days for Life t-shirts, visits to dozens of Waco-area churches, and even a newspaper ad inviting community members to join the vigil. The ad was signed by 64 area pastors, and by day 40, the number of campaign participants tripled to more than 300. Some volunteers drove more than 50 miles to attend the vigil.

Most importantly, in addition to the mother and baby spared from abortion on day one, the 40 Days for Life vigil led several more Planned Parenthood clients to skip their appointments.

The grassroots nature of Waco's 40 Days for Life campaign stands in sharp contrast with Planned Parenthood's top-down corporate approach. The Waco abortion facility is part of Planned Parenthood of Greater Texas, a \$28 million per year operation that also runs abortion centers in Austin, Dallas and Fort Worth. While a newspaper article covering the start of the Waco 40 Days for Life campaign featured quotes and testimonies from a number of local volunteers, Planned Parenthood provided only a sterile corporate statement crafted by headquarters.

Pro-life enthusiasm is effective because it's local. That's a powerful force Planned Parenthood can't match because it simply doesn't have the buy-in of the community. According to Pisciotta, aside from the input of a handful of local board members, "major decisions for Planned Parenthood in Waco are not made by Wacoans."

Even the abortion provider is from out-of-town. "Waco Planned Parenthood has always relied on a circuit-riding abortionist," Pisciotta said. The job is currently held by a self-proclaimed "fly-in abortionista" who travels from New England to perform abortions three days every other week.

