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Work resumes at Planned Parenthood site

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Two months after a contractor boycott shut down work on a Planned Parenthood clinic that will offer abortion services, construction has resumed at the South Austin site.

Project planners hope to meet their original fall completion date.

"We're more committed than ever," Planned Parenthood spokeswoman Danielle Tierney said Tuesday. "We've been encouraged and inspired by support, not only in this community, but from pro-choice supporters everywhere."

The boycott drew national attention in November when the previous general contractor, Browning Construction of San Antonio, pulled out. Browning said it couldn't get subcontractors to do the work.

Chris Danze, an Austin foundation contractor, organized the boycott. It targeted suppliers of workers and materials _ including plumbers, air conditioning and dry wall installers _ and ground the project to a halt within six weeks.

Tierney called the work stoppage "emotionally devastating" but said that as soon as the project was halted, other contractors called to offer their services.

To get restarted, Planned Parenthood decided to operate as its own general contractor and workers first returned Jan. 8. Now workers can be seen shoveling dirt, carrying boards and driving heavy machinery that kicks up clouds of dust.

Planned Parenthood won't identify the companies working for fear of another telephone and letter writing campaign from Danze. The site is surrounded by a fence of orange nylon webbing and work trucks carry no identifying markings.

"It's our commitment to protecting the safety and privacy for our team," Tierney said.

Planned Parenthood officials have called the boycott a campaign of intimidation and harassment. Danze says it has been peaceful but acknowledges it is meant to be forceful.

He recruited contractors to join what he called the Texas Contractors and Suppliers for Life Association. And he asked churches to avoid businesses who work on the project. Danze said he has taken that effort nationwide, sending letters to Catholic bishops around the country.

Danze said he's also attempted to contact major national suppliers of plumbing, air conditioning, elevators and other equipment.

He doesn't know yet who is currently working on the clinic but said he'll be patient.

"The plumber and electrician will have to take out city permits," Danze said. "We'll know who they are."

While anti-abortion groups have touted the boycott's early success as a new wave of activism, donations to Planned Parenthood in Central Texas rose sharply after the initial wave of publicity.

Planned Parenthood's fund-raising goal for the Choice Project last year was \$720,000. The group finished 2003 with just over \$1 million, with \$488,623 coming in November and December, Tierney said.

"To be completely frank," Tierney said, "Chris Danze is the best fund-raiser we've ever had."

Tierney said it's too early to tell if the delay will increase the original \$6.2 million budget.

Danze calls the boycott a "limited success" so far.

"We take it one day at a time," he said. "We make no predictions about the future, just hard work and prayer."