

Waco group urging boycott of Girl Scout cookies

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FORT WORTH, Texas - (KRT) - People in Waco, Texas, were more than a bit taken aback after turning on a Christian radio station and hearing a community leader call for a boycott of Thin Mints and Caramel deLites.

"I encourage you to join me in abstaining from Girl Scout cookies," John Pisciotta, director of Pro-Life Waco and an associate professor of economics at Baylor University, has been saying for two weeks in public-service announcements running around the clock on KBDE/89.9. Pisciotta then says the Waco-based Bluebonnet Council of Girl Scouts supports Planned Parenthood's annual sex education seminars.

The vaguely worded radio announcements are the latest and most public attempt by the group to discourage the Girl Scouts from even a casual affiliation with Planned Parenthood, an international organization that promotes reproductive freedom and provides health care services related to reproduction.

The campaign has caused controversy in the community and confusion among some Girl Scout troops.

"This foisted an adult conversation on a bunch of little innocent girls," Pat Stone, education director of Planned Parenthood of Central Texas, said this week in a phone interview. "It's making them think of things they shouldn't have to worry about."

There have been only a few secondhand reports about adults turning down cookies because "the Girl Scouts support abortion," said Beth Vivio, executive director of the Bluebonnet Council of Girl Scouts. The comments reportedly were made to scouts, who are between 6 and 18 years old.

Pisciotta said: "I don't take pleasure in upsetting families and upsetting little girls. That is a downside of this. But it did get the conversation going."

The Girl Scouts do not take a position on abortion or sex education, Vivio said. And none of the cookie money earned by the 6,000 girls in the 14-county district goes to Planned Parenthood or any other organization, she said.

The council does, however, put the national Girl Scouts logo on posters for Planned Parenthood of Central Texas' annual summer sex education seminar for fifth- through ninth-graders, an event that 400 to 700 adolescents voluntarily attend every year.

Although more than 20 other organizations also put their names on the posters, Pro-Life Waco hasn't pursued any of those organizations so aggressively, Pisciotta said.

The group has been trying for years to discourage the Girl Scouts from any affiliation with Planned Parenthood, but in May, when the Bluebonnet Council honored Pam Smallwood, director of Planned Parenthood of Central Texas, with a Woman of Distinction award, the battle was raised to a new level.

"When I saw the head of Planned Parenthood held up as role model to little girls, that was great irritation to me," Pisciotta said in a phone interview. The 40- to 60-some members of Pro-Life Waco, who meet monthly, then turned to the cookie tactic.

So far, the fallout has been limited. Two of the 400 Girl Scout troops in the Bluebonnet Council's Central Texas district have reportedly disbanded after learning of the Planned Parenthood connection.

The controversy has made for better cookie sales in Waco.

Vivio said the Girl Scouts expect to sell more than the average 432,000 boxes of cookies during the sale, which runs through February. And the Girl Scouts office has seen more calls and drop-in visitors requesting cookies.

A flurry of letters to the editor of the "Waco Tribune-Herald" supports her assessment and outnumber the writers who favor Pro-Life Waco's campaign.

"You (Pro-Life Waco) just made buying Girl Scout cookies a political statement," wrote M.B. Tankersley of Woodway, "and it's one I am not afraid to make. Thanks for the reminder that we need to support this worthy organization."