

Clinic won't make move

Planned Parenthood says group's opposition not behind decision

By Kristi L. Nelson

Saturday, August 8, 2009

The Pro-Life Coalition of East Tennessee is claiming a victory. But Planned Parenthood of Middle and East Tennessee says Knoxville would lose valuable services without its presence.

Planned Parenthood announced Friday that because of a "mutual business decision" between the organization and property owner James Simpson, it would not relocate its West Knoxville clinic to a building of his being renovated on Homberg Drive.

The move had prompted the formation of the Bearden-based Pro-Life Coalition of East Tennessee, which put up a Web site, staged a press conference earlier this week and plans a "celebratory" gathering today on Kingston Pike, in place of a scheduled rally against the move.

The coalition also organized a three-week campaign of writing and calling the property owner, management company and contractors, urging them not to work with Planned Parenthood.

Coalition spokeswoman Lisa Morris believes those letters and calls stopped the move. But Jeff Teague, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood of Middle and East Tennessee, said, "Let me assure you, that had nothing to do with it."

Property owner Simpson did not return calls for comment.

The coalition had at first opposed the move based on the belief that Planned Parenthood would perform surgical abortions in the new facility, but Teague said the move to a larger space was only to serve more clients in a better laid-out facility, and that the organization would not perform surgical abortions in Knoxville as long as there were other providers. Planned Parenthood does dispense RU486, a drug that can terminate pregnancies up to nine weeks.

The coalition then argued that Planned Parenthood had no place in a "family-oriented" neighborhood such as Bearden.

"As a resident and a mother, I am thrilled to know this goal has been accomplished," Morris said. "It just proves what ordinary people can accomplish when they stand up for what is right."

Teague said the Knoxville clinic will continue to provide services - including birth control, counseling, testing and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, education and RU486 - at 8078 Kingston Pike while the organization looks for another space.

"We just want to make sure that what we do is in the best interest of our clients," Teague said. "For nearly 50 years, Planned Parenthood has been a critical community resource in Knoxville. Nearly 2,000 women and men in East Tennessee depend on Planned Parenthood for vital preventive and reproductive health care, and we are dedicated to continuing to provide them high-quality, low-cost care."

Kristi L. Nelson may be reached at 865-342-6434.



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