

CLASS

Sex-ed program stirs debate

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several questions and answers he found objectionable, from oral and anal sex to pornography, abortion and "being prepared in case Prom Night is the night."

"This is health education," he said. "This is not medically accurate information, it is marketing manipulation." Pisciotta and other locals who oppose abortion contend that Planned Parenthood wants teen-agers to be sexually active to generate business for the abortion clinic. Pisciotta's charges were repeatedly challenged at the press conference by John Herbert, who called himself a "freelance journalist." Herbert said he wanted to counter the "tremendous amount of negativity in this community" about a program his now 25-year-old married daughter attended for many years.

Fam Smallwood, Planned Parenthood executive director, said that she, too, is shocked by some of the questions asked on the Web site, "but the philosophy of the Web site is to answer questions factually," without passing judgment on whether they should have been asked at all, she said. The site is not promoted at Nobody's Fool, other than a card with the Web site address on it handed to ninth-graders after class.

TeenWire.Com is one of several Web-zines that target an older teenaged audience and offers non-judgemental answers to frank questions from youngsters, Smallwood said.

Kaiser Family Health presents a similar site, "Sex Smarts," in conjunction with

Seventeen magazine, to address sexual decision-making, including how to say no to intercourse, and facts about HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Columbia University Health Education Program has a site, titled "Go Ask Alice," that offers a similar format.

"There is a difference in opinion (between Planned Parenthood and protesters) on how to answer questions and how forthright to be with those answers," Smallwood said.

Grandmothers' debate

Two grandmothers, on opposite sides of the issue, seemed to encapsulate the debate:

Alice Murphy, 62, of Duncannon, brought her granddaughter, 13-year-old Kylie of Lake Whitney, to Nobody's Fool. This was the eighth-grader's second year for the conference. Her parents attended a preview event Wednesday night with about 150 others before sending her to the Thursday morning sessions. Murphy said she was happy that youngsters have more access to straightforward information than she had in her youth.

"It was 'fun' coming in this morning," Murphy said, "with people trying to tell us 'Do you know what is being taught in there? Do you know what you are doing?' I was here last year, so I knew what to expect." She eventually took a protester's pamphlet, she said, just so she could have something to show the other demonstrators she'd already been "tagged."

"I can understand why everyone gets so emotional. Everyone has an opinion," Murphy said. "But I kept my head up and just kept walking."

One of the people she had to get past was Jeanne Arnsman, a parishioner of St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Elk. A first-year protester, the mother of

'Fool' protesters, backers square off

350 youths attend controversial sex-ed program

BY TERRI JO RYAN
Tribune-Herald staff writer

The 350 youths who attended the 15th annual Nobody's Fool sex-education conference Thursday in Waco had to walk past several dozen adults from area churches adamant that they not be there.

Several adults, many also from churches, were just as determined to see that the students make it inside the Waco Convention Center, past placards reading "Promiscuity 101" and "Stop Planned Promiscuity."

The event, a three-hour course in age- and gender-segregated classrooms sponsored by Planned Parenthood of Central Texas, has drawn the ire of several who believe it

sends the wrong message to local youths. Supporters of the conference say it teaches Opponents say it encourages



Staff photo — Duane A. Lavery

John Pisciotta (right), co-director of Pro-Life Waco, levels charges of pornography and promiscuity against Planned Parenthood of Central Texas on Thursday during a press conference in front of the Waco Convention Center. The annual Nobody's Fool conference took place inside.



Staff photo — Duane A. Lavery

Sixth-graders Brittani Rodriguez, Kourtney Kizer and Kistin Rodriguez make "cycle" bracelets from beads, in a lesson plan about the monthly menstrual cycle, during Nobody's Fool.

that research has shown that said Nobody's Fool offered only a dangerous degradation of the "God-given gift of human sexuality."

"They are dealing with sex as if it is an entertainment," she said. "Kids are going to use kids and kids are going to get hurt — all with the blessings of their parents, obviously."

Seeking clarity

Smallwood said all students are encouraged to talk to their parents, who should be their primary sex educators. She said

teens to have sex.

At a press conference that took place after classes began for students, many of whom were escorted by parents, grandparents or other caregivers, John Pisciotta, co-director of Pro-Life Waco, charged that Planned Parenthood was being disingenuous in claiming to offer an abstinence-based education. Especially upsetting to him and about three dozen followers was TeenWire.com, a Web site that offers frank answers to blunt questions asked anonymously by teenagers.

Pisciotta said the material he found there was "atrocious," "disgusting," "outrageously immoral" and "decadent." He distributed printed copies of

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decrease.

"A lot of people think it (pregnancy) can't happen to them, it's that 'invincibility thing.' It's sad to think that could have been prevented, with more knowledge," said Sims, who has chosen to abstain from sex.

Vance Murphy, 25, another alumni of the program who now volunteers for it, said, "I learned to 'save sex' and not rush into things. It teaches about taking responsibility for the things you do."

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