

Pro-Life Waco to target cancer walk

Race for the Cure gives money to Planned Parenthood

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Dena Williams had planned to set up a booth at her church this Sunday to recruit people to be on a team for the local Komen Race for the Cure.

This year's race would have been a first for Williams, who was asked to organize a team by a friend who is a breast cancer survivor. But the Waco resident canceled her plans this week after learning part of the money from the fund-raiser goes to Planned Parenthood of Central Texas.

family planning organization is earmarked for mammograms for low-income women and follow-up care for those with abnormal screenings.

Local Komen affiliates emphasize that the money given to Planned Parenthood is only used for breast health purposes. They receive reports twice a year to make sure funds are spent appropriately, they said.

But that doesn't change Williams' stance. She said she won't support any event where proceeds go to an organization that performs abortions.

"We can't support that," Williams, 41, said. "Since I go to Antioch (Community Church), we would have had a big team, too."

The money given to the

Williams may be the first

person in Central Texas to abstain from the race because of its connection to Planned Parenthood. But she likely won't be the last.

Pro-Life Waco, a group which opposes abortion, plans to make the connection an issue this spring. Although officials say they have not yet finalized the campaign, it will include at least one public event.

Eva Silver Sanchez, who used to work for the national Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, will be in Waco on March 10, said Barbara Myers, co-director of Pro-Life Waco. Sanchez resigned from the organization after learning that some money raised by Komen

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Cancer race under fire

Komen fund-raiser's ties to Planned Parenthood questioned/1C



File photo

More than 8,000 people participated in last year's Komen Central Texas Race for the Cure. Organizers hope 10,000 people will participate in this year's race, set for April 2.

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Boycott of event not planned

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goes to Planned Parenthood.

The details of Sanchez's appearance, such as time and place, have not yet been decided. But she will speak about why she quit the foundation, her personal experience with breast cancer and how Komen funds Planned Parenthood, Myers said.

For many local residents, the anti-abortion group's activities likely raise the specter of last year's Girl Scout cookie boycott. John Pisciotta, the other co-director of Pro-Life Waco, organized that campaign, which was launched because the local Girl Scout chapter was a nonfinancial supporter of a sex education seminar hosted by Planned Parenthood.

Myers said her group is not calling for a boycott of the local race, officially known as the Komen Central Texas Race for the Cure. But it does want people to be fully informed, she says.

For one thing, Myers wants to make clear that some proceeds go to Planned Parenthood. This year it is getting \$45,000 in grants, and it has gotten smaller amounts in the past.

Myers also wants people to know the Komen Foundation doesn't cite abortion as a risk factor for breast cancer. She said numerous studies have supported the link, which some researchers say is the result of a pregnancy termination interrupting the normal cycle of hormones and increasing a woman's risk of developing breast cancer.

"People can make up their own minds as long as they know the truth," Myers said. "The Girl Scout cookie boycott was kind of a freak thing, and we're not trying to find one cause after another. But this is what we've been doing for the past 10 years, educating people."

The aim of the education campaign, Myers said, is to get local residents to urge the Komen affiliate to stop giving money to Planned Parenthood. Not all Komen affiliates do.

"They can give their money to a lot of other places, if they truly want to do breast screenings," Myers said.

Reason for giving

That's not entirely accurate, said Mary Ann Riggs, co-chairperson of this year's local race. The Komen affiliate gives money to Planned Parenthood, she said, because the family planning organization reaches women who likely would not be helped otherwise.

Ninety-eight percent of the local women Planned Parenthood sees each year are low-income and that's a population the affiliate wants to target, Riggs said. The Komen affiliate also gives money to other local groups to target different populations, she said.

For example, Waco's Family Practice Center also receives money, Riggs said. But the center treats only McLennan County residents who have a green card, whereas Planned Parenthood will treat anyone in the Central Texas area, regardless of immigration status.

"No one else does that," Riggs said.

Others say no link

As for listing abortion as a risk factor for breast cancer, Riggs said Komen doesn't because studies have not shown a link. The country's major medical organizations, such as the American Cancer Society and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, agree there is no evidence of a causal link.

Asked if organizers are afraid attention from abortion opponents will decrease participation in the April 2 race, Riggs said she is hopeful local residents will "see the big picture and not jump to a conclusion."

"Really we just feel like we are doing a good thing," she said. "People have their own opinions. ... We just want people to know we're out here to make breast cancer a thing of the past."

Planned Parenthood executive director Pam Smallwood also said she hopes the controversy won't hurt the race. The Komen funds are the only money the family planning organization gets to provide mammograms and follow-up care for low-income women, she said.

"I'm very surprised anyone would want to prevent women, especially uninsured women, from having access to lifesaving health care," she said.

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