

Abortion opponents gather

Memorial service marks Roe vs. Wade anniversary

By JODI WETUSKI
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With prayers, personal stories and tears, more than 100 abortion opponents paid tribute Wednesday to the babies who have been aborted in the 25 years since the Supreme Court's Roe vs. Wade decision.

"Which one of those babies would have found a cure for cancer or peace in the Middle East?" asked Barbara Myers of Central Texas Respect Life.

Today is the 25th anniversary of the Roe vs. Wade decision — in which the Supreme Court ruled that women have a constitutional right to abortion.

But in Waco, it wasn't until this decade that abortion became a local issue. In November 1991, residents learned that Planned Parenthood of Central Texas intended to open an abortion clinic in Waco and begin performing abortions in 1992.

But Planned Parenthood didn't perform its first abortion in Waco at its Columbus Avenue clinic until Jan. 10, 1994. The organization's officials said then that their plans were delayed because they had trouble finding a doctor to perform abortions.

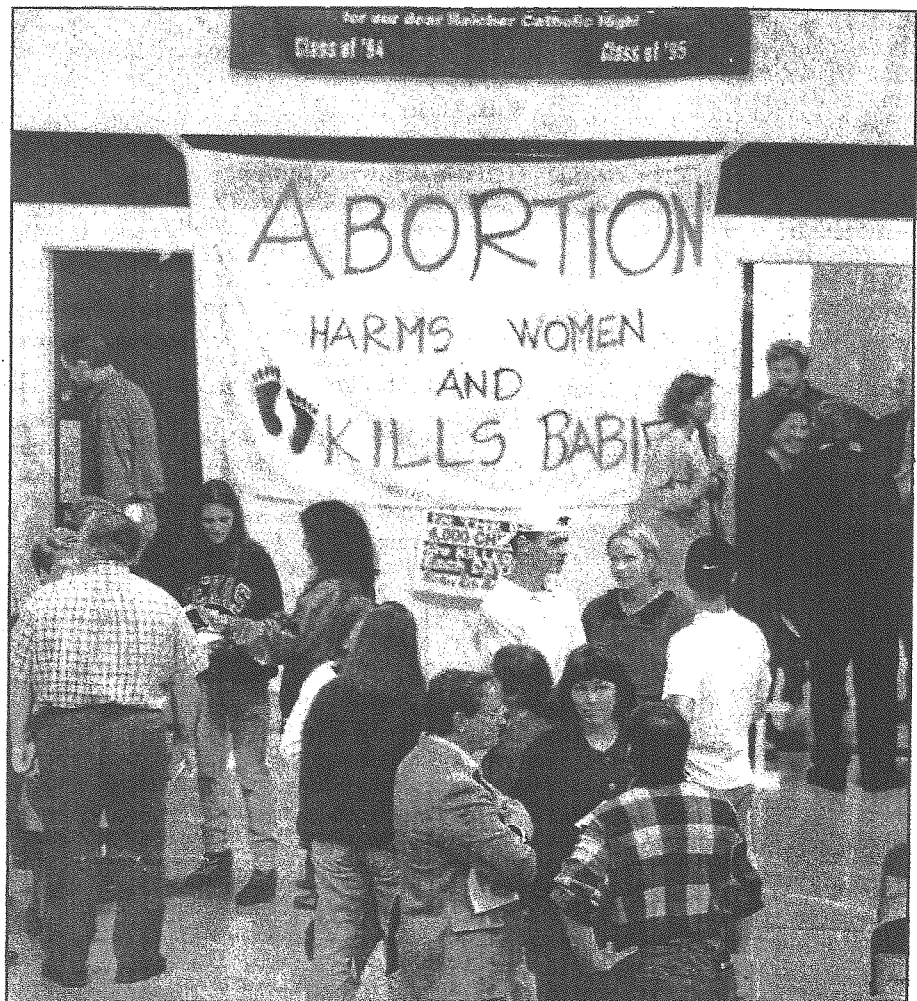
Anti-abortion activists, however, said that their protests kept the clinic from performing abortions.

Today, Sue Havens-Drake, executive director of Planned Parenthood, says that no amount of protest can keep her agency from protecting women's right to choose.

And the number of abortions performed on Columbus Avenue is growing every year.

There were 397 abortions at Waco's Planned Parenthood in 1994, 679 in 1995, 733 in 1996 and 841 in 1997.

"They have little protests, but obviously they are not preventing women from getting abortions," Havens-Drake said.



Staff photo — Rod Aydelotte

Abortion opponents gather at Reicher Catholic High School on Wednesday for a memorial service honoring aborted fetuses.

But that's not going to stop protesters from trying to make an impact, speakers said at Wednesday night's event at Reicher Catholic High School. The speakers said they fervently believe that they are doing the right thing by protesting abortion and are encouraged if even one woman decides against the procedure.

"God hates abortion," said the Rev. Ramiro Pena of Christ the King Baptist Church. "I know we don't associate the word hate with God... but the Bible says he hates the shed of innocent blood."

Pena shared a story about his personal confrontation with abortion that choked up a few people in the audience.

In 1992, when his wife was three months pregnant with her third child, tests indicated that the baby would be born with Down Syndrome, Pena said.

Pena said hospital workers assumed his wife would want an abortion and asked her when it should be scheduled. The Penas said they were against abortion, and they wanted the baby no matter what.

Their son, now 5 years old, was born healthy, Pena said as the crowd applauded.

"There is a plan, a purpose and a destiny for every child," he said.