Anti-abortion forces canvas BR; some residents angry

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More than 800 protesters of abortion poured through the Baton Rouge area last week, waging a war of words against what they consider society's subservience to a form of genocide.

"The acceptance of abortion -- it's a form of brainwashing," said Phil Cheever, one of the leaders of a loosely organized effort by about 30 churches and organizations to place anti-abortion brochures on the doors of 100,000 homes and apartments throughout the area.

The campaign, however, incensed some members of the community who later complained to the group that the brochures were unacceptably brutal and biased.

Cheever said that society has turned a deaf ear to anti-abortion protests because the frequency of publicity about abortion has reached such an intense pitch that the controversy is no longer clearly distinguishable.

Robert Sciarni, spokesman for the group, said in a prepared release: "Abortion is a problem, a tragedy we do not want to face.

"We make the abortion clinics blend into our neighborhoods -- we call them 'culture' because we don't want to face the reality that this is where babies die.

"Cheever said the abortion industry has made an issue out of how unwanted pregnancies can be received and has disregarded the ultimate issue of how to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

"What society needs to learn, Cheever said, is that a grassroots lesson in social responsibility -- not sexual convenience.

"It's a matter of education," he said.

"And the right thing to do isn't always the easiest. The best contraceptive is oral -- the word isn't and it can be done." Cheever said, however, that the controversy is the fundamental principle of the abortion industry, which conceals the nature of its operations by using such euphemisms as 'pregnancy termination' rather than 'abortion' in its advertising.

"The Nazi used to do that," he said. "I believe they called the vehicle they used for bringing the Jews to the gas chambers 'transport service for the sea.'"

"But the German people bought it -- just as civilization has accepted abortion. What difference is there?"

Cheever said the usual focus of abortion debate -- the criterion of when a human fetus becomes a human being -- is not so much a hopefully irreconcilable issue as it is an irrelevant question.

"It doesn't matter when the fetus technically becomes a human life," he said. "The fact remains that what is being destroyed is that which has been -- since its very inception -- the capacity to become a human life.

But Peggy Cottle, spokeswoman for Delta Women's Clinic -- one of several abortion clinics in Baton Rouge -- said the protesters failed to realize what she considers the moral justification for abortion -- the necessity of dealing humanely with preventable unwanted pregnancies.

"The Supreme Court decision was made in 1973 because abortion did exist," she said. "People were having abortions in back alleys, and resources had to made available to make sure that women could have safe abortions.

"It's hard for me to believe that they (the protesters) are doing anything but acting out of religious frustration.

"Ms. Cottle said also that freedom of choice is as much a question of morality as the preservation of life, and patients get a more well-rounded education on pregnancy alternatives when they come to the clinic because we counsel them.

"We counsel them about the alternatives, but we also have a program to assist the patient in dealing with the emotional issues.

"We have an opportunity here to use this as a teaching tool and to give people another option.

"We always make sure to have lots of information about adoption, about the milk fund, the loving the baby who is going to be born, the mother who is going to be a mother, and the father who is going to be a father.

"This is done for a reason."

"Many a girl has changed her mind when she was on the table, and if we notice that they're crying or are just upset, we take the necessary precautions to make sure they're not making a mistake.

"The Delta Clinic, however, refused to allow Cheever in to leave his group's pamphlet at the clinic.

"The pamphlet, entitled "Children -- things we throw away," presents detailed information on abortion techniques and graphic illustrations of aborted bodies.

"Last year, the pamphlet says, more than 4,000 abortions took place at four abortion clinics in Baton Rouge.