Impact Team's Success Draws Judge's Ire

by Wendy Wright

Melbourne, FL — The Impact Team, Operation Rescue National's (ORN) 12-week training school in pro-life activism, was given a "graduation present" on April 8 by Judge Robert McGregor. The twenty-two students had been so successful in their efforts to stop abortions in Melbourne that McGregor signed a broad, restrictive injunction against all pro-lifers. Over 125 people have since been arrested for being pro-life on a forbidden sidewalk.

Aware Woman Clinic, the only abortion clinic in Melbourne, complained to the circuit judge that their business had suffered since the Impact Team started on January 18. Patricia Baird-Windle, co-owner of Aware Woman and two other clinics admitted that they had lost $3,500 per week. The number of abortions had dropped by at least half. Two abortionists and an office manager had quit. The landlord of another building she rents for an abortuary will not be renewing their lease.

Many women have decided not to go to Aware Woman because of the persistent pro-life activity and national media attention spotlighting the tension. Crisis pregnancy centers in Melbourne have reported a dramatic increase in the number of requests for assistance.

Judge McGregor granted the clinic an injunction that created a 36 foot speech-free zone around the clinic property. It prohibited activities such as "hesitation in the crosswalk...singing, chanting, yelling...or other sounds or images."

According to ORN spokesmen, since there is no legal definition for "sounds or images," this vague language could mean a person wearing a T-shirt with a picture on it, or a cross on a necklace (images) could be held in contempt of court. Sidewalk counseling and distribution of literature to people going into the clinic was also prohibited with 300 feet of the property.

The day the injunction was released, Operation Rescue National announced that they bought the house across the street from Aware Woman. Nicknamed the "Little Green House," it will be used as a crisis pregnancy center and a safe haven for pro-lifers to congregate outside the clinic and offer alternatives to abortion-bound women.

The injunction, however, has not been used to prohibit actions, but rather to prohibit a belief, according to ORN. Two days after it was handed down, about 200 pro-abortionists lined the property of Aware Woman, blocking the entrance, holding signs, and yelling. About 100 pro-lifers walked on the sidewalk, quietly singing and reading the Bible. Of the 53 people arrested — two were just videotaping the activities — all were pro-life. Keith Tucci, director of ORN, was the first one the police approached and arrested.

When the Melbourne police and Judge McGregor were asked why pro-lifers — who were not violating the injunction — were arrested but pro-abortionists — who were clearly in violation — were not, they both responded that the injunction "only applies to pro-life" people.

Impact Team members join in prayer before entering the fray around the clinic.

Clinic co-owner, Pat Baird-Windle, reads the injunction aloud to the praying Impact Team members.

On April 17, the following Saturday, 56 people, including Tucci, were arrested. The pro-lifers congregated on the lawn of the Little Green House and walked alone or in small groups across the street to pray within the 36 foot zone. The arrests took almost four hours to complete.

One man was arrested for simply walking across the street from the Little Green House to put a letter in the mailbox. The mailbox is within the speech-free zone. One man was arrested while reading aloud the First Amendment.

A professional camera crew from Washington D.C. crossed the street to get shots of the arrests. They were stopped by police and asked, "Are you pro-life?" When they answered yes, they were threatened with arrest until they promised to stay outside the 36 foot zone.

Two adults knelt and prayed with their children on the sidewalk. They were arrested. The kids were released, but the adults were charged with misdemeanor child abuse as well as violating the injunction. They are facing up to a year in jail.

On April 24, nine adults and nine juveniles were arrested for praying on the forbidden sidewalk. Six of the juveniles, who promised they would not go in the 36 foot zone again that day, were released. The three who did not were taken to the police station, questioned by a children's services representative, then released.

On April 26, four pro-lifers were able to

Pro-aborts gather to counter-demonstrate against the activities of the Impact Team.

Impact Team throws a Wedding

by Wendy Wright

At an abortuary in Fort Pierce, Florida, a young woman with an appointment to go inside told a sidewalk counselor, "All the way here, I prayed, 'God, if You're real, have someone there to stop us.'"

On February 6, at a clinic that normally never has any pro-lifers outside to offer alternatives to women, over 30 people showed up in answer to her prayer.

Tom and Penny had arrived early for their appointment that Saturday, but sat in their van crying and talking. New in town, they had no jobs, no friends, no family support, no stable home. Though Tom adores their first child, he couldn't see how they could handle a second. Together for six insecure years, Penny thought Tom would leave her if she kept this child that she already loved. Both thought the other wanted an abortion.

Tom knew something was up when he saw a school bus full of people slowly drive by. Unknown to him, this bus was carrying students and supporters of the Impact Team, Operation Rescue National's training school for pro-life activists. A few minutes later, dozens of people were standing in front of the clinic doors.

A counselor approached Tom and Penny's van and asked if they wanted to talk. When they declined, she responded, "You need to talk with me. I've had three abortions. I can tell you what's going to happen to you."

Twenty minutes later, Tom and Penny had not only decided to keep their child — they also decided to get married. Pastor Keith Tucci, Executive Director of Operation Rescue National and one of the pro-lifers blocking the clinic doors, offered to officiate. "Hey, Weddings R Us," he exclaimed. "We'll put it together for you. Just tell us when."

They chose Valentine's Day — one week away. In that one week, everything was planned and donated — from the wedding dress and tuxedo to a hotel room for the wedding night. Over 100 people came to show their support and excitement.

During the ceremony Pastor Tucci exhorted them, "Only one week ago your lives were headed toward tragedy. If you ever question if you're supposed to be married, just remember all that God has done to bring you here." The whole audience erupted in applause and praise to God.

Afterwards, one guest commented, "It's the best wedding I've ever been to." ■