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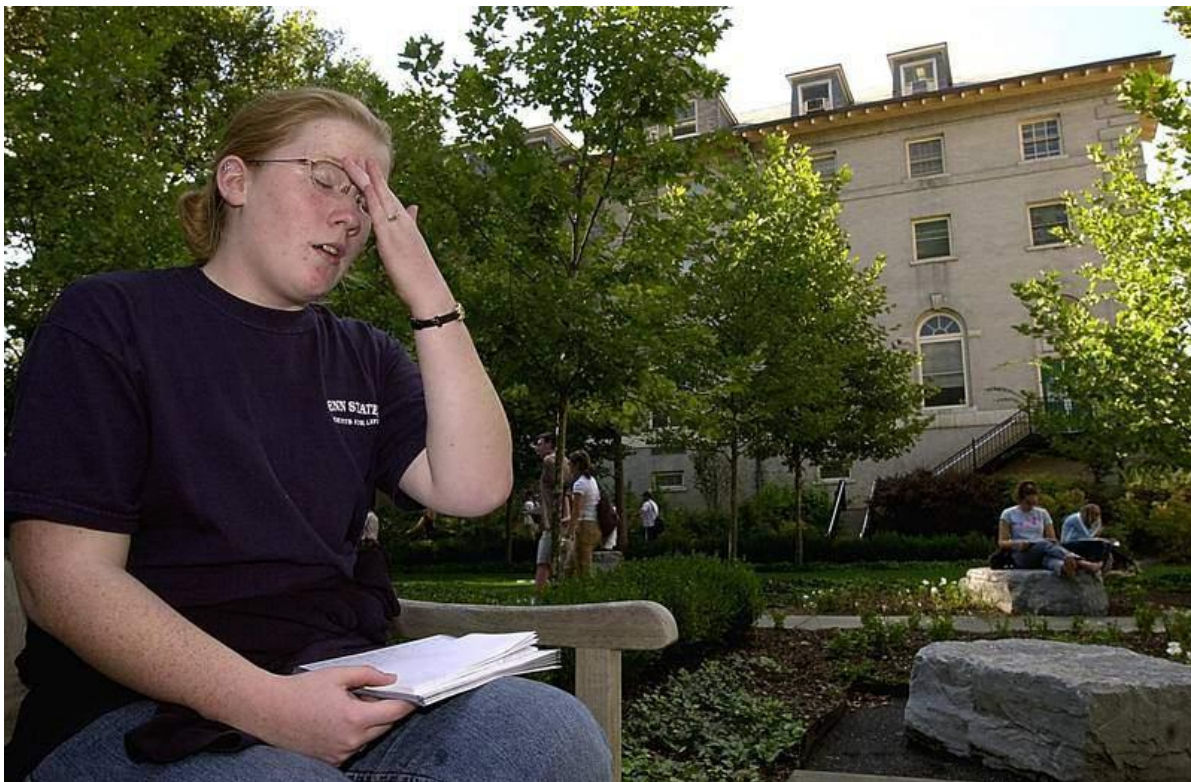
## Clinic opens today

**Abortion available in Erie for first time since '70s**

By [David Bruce](#)

david.bruce@timesnews.com

September 19, 2003 06:33 AM



Andrea Staargaard regrets the abortion she had at a New Jersey clinic owned by Steven Brigham. Brigham's Erie clinic opens today, making abortions available in Erie for the first time since the late 1970s. Janet B. Campbell

A doctor with an elusive identity and a checkered medical record will begin offering abortions today in downtown Erie at the newest of his 14 clinics.

Legal abortions have not been performed in Erie County since the late 1970s.

Steven Brigham, M.D., is not permitted to practice medicine in Pennsylvania or several other states and will not personally perform abortions at American Women's Services, 1611 Peach St.

He does own the clinic, along with 13 others in the northeastern United States.

"We worked hard to open this full-service office, and we are proud that it is opening," said Sandra Wang, district manager of the Erie clinic. "We want the community to know that we are open."

Today's scheduled abortions end Brigham's four-year fight to open the clinic. He faced opposition from local abortion opponents and other tenants in the Professional Building, where the clinic is located.

Protesters with Erie's abortion opposition group People for Life are scheduled to picket outside the building all day. A few others will work in a small office that People for Life purchased down the hall from the clinic.

"We will have a main protest in the morning, but we will have people here throughout the day," said Tim Broderick, president of People for Life. "We will have two or three people in our office, but they won't be actively protesting."

Erie police will try to ensure that any protests remain peaceful, said Chief Charles Bowers. Officers will be stationed today inside the Professional Building and at its entrances.

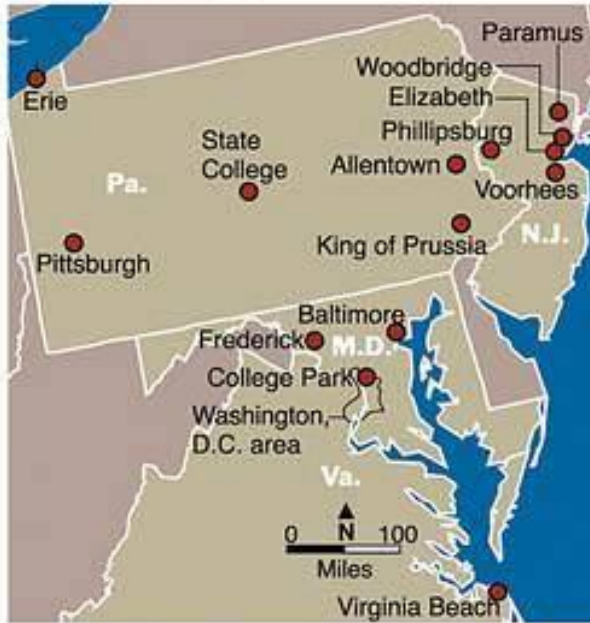
Bowers said other security precautions were put in place Thursday evening, but he would not comment about them. Additional police will be ready today to respond to any problems, Bowers added.

"It seems it's going to be peaceful and everything will be in accordance with the law, which is the way we want it," Bowers said.

## Brigham's clinics

Steven Brigham, M.D. has 14 clinics, including Erie's, that offer services such as:

- abortions
- emergency contraception (morning after pills)
- testing for sexually transmitted diseases
- pap smear exams
- breast exams
- depo provera
- lunelle
- diaphragms



## Brigham and medical licenses

Brigham does not have an active license to practice medicine in any of the states where he owns or operates abortion clinics. Some states have revoked his license, while Brigham has allowed his license to expire in other states. Here's a state-by-state breakdown:

■ **Pennsylvania:** He voluntarily placed his medical license on inactive status in 1992 to end an investigation by the Pennsylvania Medical Board into one of his clinics.

■ **New York:** State medical board revoked his medical license in 1994 after two women were seriously injured during abortions. The New York State Supreme Court convicted him in 1998 of scheming to defraud, a felony. The ruling was later overturned, but Brigham served a short jail term and was fined for failing to file corporate tax returns.

■ **California:** Suspended his medical license in 2000 after the New York State Supreme Court ruling.

■ **Florida:** Revoked his license in 1996 for failing to report a disciplinary action taken by another licensing authority. Appeal pending.

■ **Georgia:** Medical license expired in 1993.

■ **New Jersey:** Medical License expired June 30. State had previously reprimanded him and placed restrictions on his license. As of Monday, his license had not been renewed.

SOURCES: [www.americanwomenservices.com](http://www.americanwomenservices.com); staff reports

ERIE TIMES-NEWS

Brigham himself hasn't always operated within the letter of the law. He spent 78 days in an Albany County, N.Y., jail in 2000 for failing to file corporate income taxes.

He also has run into problems with several state medical boards. New York revoked his license in 1994 after two women were injured during second-trimester abortions at his clinics.



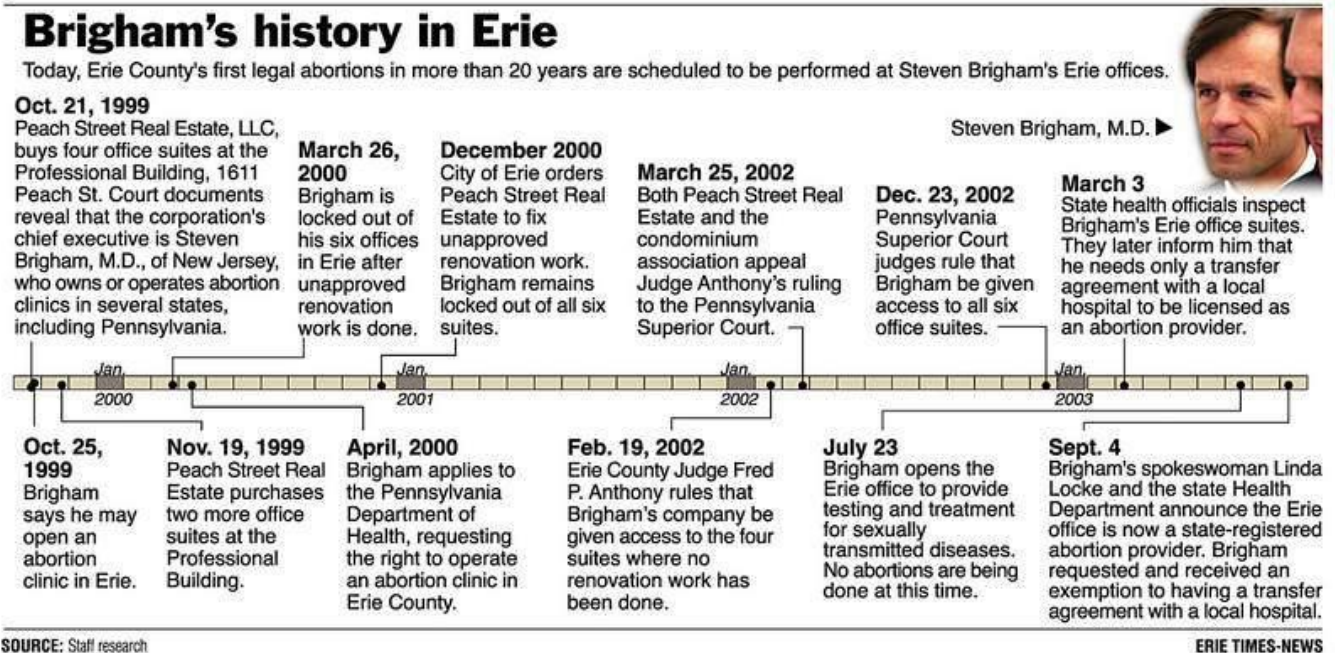
Florida revoked his license in 1996 for failing to report a disciplinary action taken by another licensing authority. Several other states have suspended his license or imposed other disciplinary actions.

Brigham agreed to place his Pennsylvania medical license on inactive status in 1992 and never try to activate it to end an investigation by the Pennsylvania Medical Board into his Wyomissing clinic.

"Steven's history is tainted," said Ron Fitzsimmons, executive director of the National Coalition of Abortion Providers. "There have been a number of issues at several of his clinics. It all adds up to him not being an abortion provider who provides quality care."

Brigham declined through his chief operations officer Linda Locke to talk with the Erie Times-News. Wang said her boss is misunderstood.

"Unfortunately, Dr. Brigham has been portrayed in a negative light by the media," Wang said as she stood in the hallway outside American Women's Services' Erie office. "He does not practice medicine in this office. Our staff strives to provide the best medical care available."



One of the physicians Brigham employs has also run into legal trouble.

**Vikram Kaji, M.D.**, performed abortions at Brigham's State College clinic in 1997 and his Voorhees clinic in 2001, even though he was disciplined by the New Jersey Medical Board in 1993 and the Pennsylvania Medical Board in 1994 for sexually abusing patients.

The New York Medical Board revoked his medical license in 1995 for the offenses in New Jersey.

Kaji could not be reached for comment. He told the Centre Daily Times in 1997 that he had consensual sex with a patient in the birthing room of his office.

Neither Wang nor Locke would identify physicians who perform abortions for American Women's Services.

Kaji told the Centre Daily Times he performed abortions at State College, and a Penn State student who had an abortion at Brigham's Voorhees clinic in 2001 showed the Erie Times-News a copy of her prescription filled out by Kaji and listing his office as the Voorhees clinic.

As a result of these and other legal and medical troubles, Fitzsimmons said he has refused Brigham's repeated requests to join NCAP. Locke said Brigham has not tried to join the organization.

Another abortion rights organization also disapproves of the way Brigham runs his businesses.

"We would not refer a woman to any of his clinics," said Vicki Saporta, president of the National Abortion Federation, which represents about 400 abortion clinics but none of Brigham's offices. "We would advise a woman to drive to a clinic which we can assure can provide the highest quality of health care."

Brigham has kept a low profile since buying the Erie office suites in September and October 1999. He has not responded to recent interview requests.

Abortion protesters in State College and Allentown, where Brigham owns clinics, said they haven't seen him in years. Rumors are rampant about where the doctor lives and spends his time.

"I hear that he lives in his car at one of the clinics," said the Rev. Dean Gravaris, an abortion opponent who visited Brigham while the doctor was in jail.

Brigham is known to have visited Erie just once, to meet with attorneys and inspect his office suites in 2000. Abortion opponents in other cities have seen him on occasion and said he is charming but likes to antagonize.

"I was protesting outside his King of Prussia clinic in July, and he was there taking pictures," said Cristina Barba, a Penn State University sophomore. "He asked me where I went to school, and when I told him, he said he had never been to his State College clinic but asked me if it was a lovely facility. It's in an old house."

Gavaris, an abortion opponent, asked Brigham many religious questions during his hourlong visit to jail.

"He's very personable but he feels that everyone is out to get him, especially the pro-life people," said Gavaris, executive director of Gateway Pregnancy Centers Inc., based in Elizabeth, N.J. "I saw a normal guy who has a lousy job. He's a crook, but he's a person. I feel sorry for him."

Staff writer Tim Hahn contributed to this story.

DAVID BRUCE *can be reached at 870-1736 or by e-mail.*