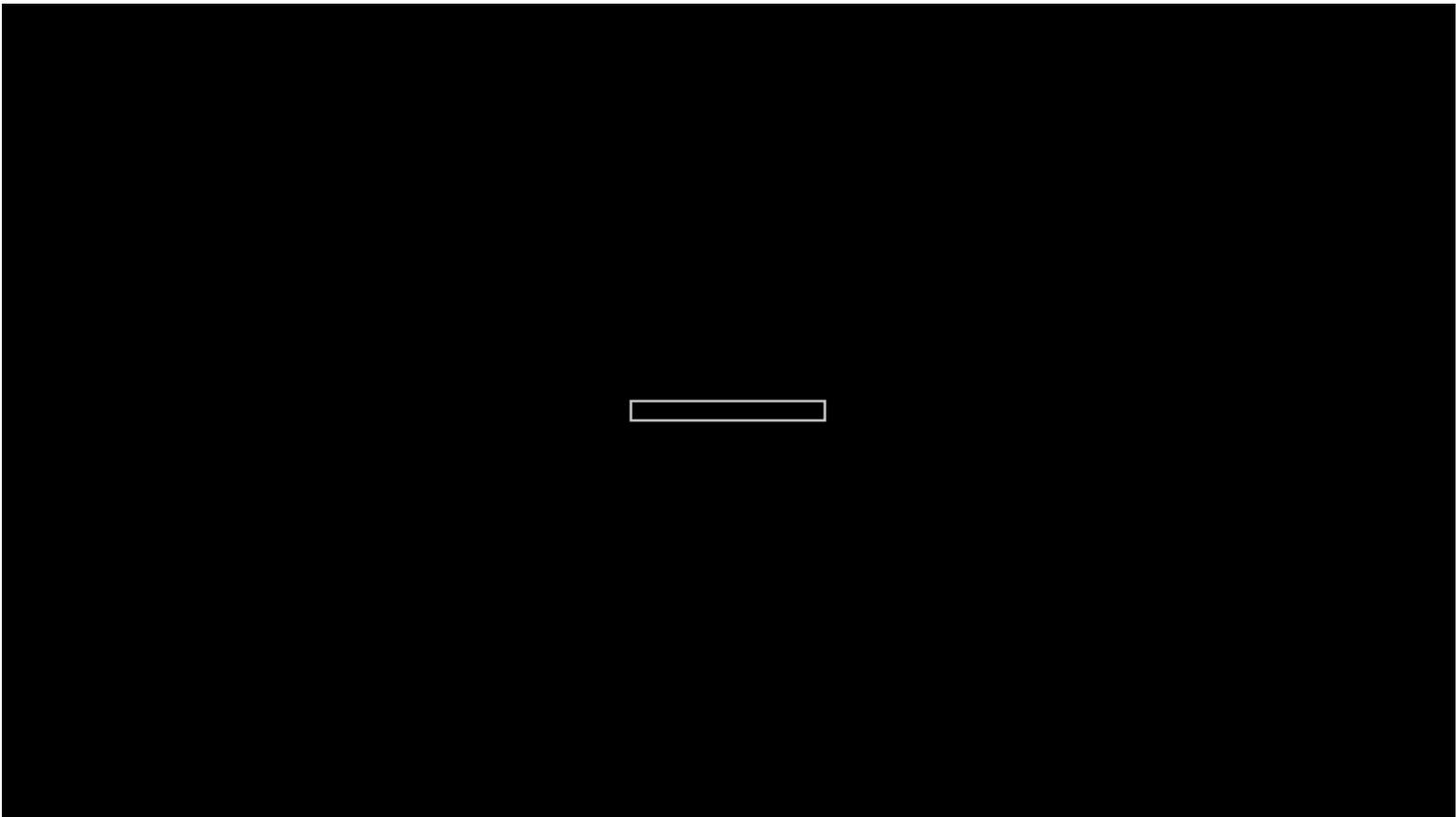




Business

Outspoken abortion clinic opens first Chicago-area location



A pamphlet with instructions and other resources is available at a new Carafem abortion clinic on Oct. 3, 2018, in Skokie.

Carafem, which also has clinics in Atlanta and outside of Washington, D.C., has become known for its bold advertising. (Erin Hooley/Chicago Tribune)

By **Lisa Schenker**

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An abortion clinic that's attracted attention for its bold ads in other states has opened in Skokie — a move that comes amid both efforts to destigmatize the procedure and discussion about how a newly reconfigured Supreme Court might reshape abortion laws.

On a recent day, Carafem employees bustled around their new office, unpacking boxes in anticipation of welcoming patients Tuesday. The clinic is designed to make patients comfortable, with exam rooms painted pink and purple and medical equipment kept out of sight in large cabinets. In addition to abortions, the clinic offers women's health services such as placement of IUDs and testing for sexually transmitted infections.

Carafem also has clinics in Atlanta and outside of Washington, D.C., in Chevy Chase, Md. It chose the Chicago area for its third clinic because Illinois' abortion laws aren't as restrictive as laws in neighboring states, but it can draw patients from those other states, said Melissa Grant, Carafem's chief operating officer.

The Chicago area already has a number of abortion clinics, but Carafem, founded as a nonprofit in 2013, has become known in other parts of the country for its outspoken approach.

In 2016, Washington D.C., transportation officials blocked the company from running

ads in the city's Metrorail stations, saying the ads violated the agency's prohibition on certain medical and issue-oriented ads, according to a lawsuit filed in federal court last year by Carafem, and others, against the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. Carafem's rejected advertisement touted medication for abortion as a "10-week-after pill."

Carafem, represented by the American Civil Liberties Union, is still involved in litigation with the transit authority over the ad. Another ad, accepted by the transit authority, featured the phrase "Abortion. Yeah, we do that" against a bright pink background.

In the Chicago area, Carafem will first advertise its clinic online and on social media, and traditional advertising will follow by year's end, Grant said. Carafem hasn't decided what its physical Chicago-area advertising will look like, "but I can't imagine we're going to be quiet," said Kat Boyd, Carafem's director of operations.

It's an approach that's in line with efforts in recent years by pro-abortion rights advocates to destigmatize the procedure. Nearly 24 percent of women in the U.S. will have an abortion by age 45, based on 2014 data, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a research and policy organization that works to advance sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Several years ago, amid congressional attempts to defund [Planned Parenthood](#), activists created a #shoutyourabortion hashtag on Twitter, which women used to publicly share their stories of getting abortions.

Abortion providers elsewhere also have taken steps to make themselves more visible, said Nikki Madsen, executive director of the Abortion Care Network, a national membership organization for independent abortion care providers, including Carafem. Clinics and advocacy groups put up billboards in Texas and Indiana this year advocating for abortion rights.

The increased visibility comes amid recent events that have rattled abortion rights advocates. President Donald Trump has appointed two conservative justices to the Supreme Court, Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh, raising questions about whether the court might undo or chip away at abortion laws.

The Supreme Court recently ruled against a California law that required anti-abortion crisis pregnancy centers to tell pregnant patients about the availability of publicly funded

abortions. Illinois has a law that requires physicians who don't want to perform abortions for moral reasons to help patients access abortion services elsewhere, if patients ask. A district court has blocked enforcement of that law as litigation over it continues.

“I do think when our human rights are being basically dismantled that people are stepping up and taking more bold and public action,” Madsen said. “They’re really stepping up to say we are here, we are visible, and we want you to know where you can get care that you can trust.”

Planned Parenthood of Illinois, which has 17 centers across the state, also aims to provide abortion and other services “unapologetically,” said Paula Thronton Greear, vice president of external affairs for Planned Parenthood of Illinois. Planned Parenthood does much of its advertising digitally, she said. It just opened a new clinic in Flossmoor in January.

“I think as attacks on abortion rights and care continue, many people are coming forward to share their personal stories to help normalize it,” Greear said.

Carafem also is trying to normalize the procedure by making visits to its clinics as relaxing as possible, such as by sending patients home with pink bags containing mints and tea and spacing out appointments so patients don’t have to linger in waiting rooms amid strangers.

Carafem offers two types of abortions: one that is achieved by taking a series of pills, first in the office and then at home, and, another, aspiration, that uses a suction device and is performed in the clinic. Carafem charges \$425 to \$475 for the pills and \$550 for aspiration, without insurance. Skokie’s Carafem is in the process of joining insurance companies’ local networks so the medication and aspiration can be covered by insurers in coming months, Boyd said.

“While abortion is a common medical procedure, there’s stigma attached to it,” Boyd said. “We try to create an atmosphere that’s warm, welcoming and normalizing.”

Some say efforts such as Carafem’s to normalize abortion are just further proof that the procedure is anything but normal and no amount of advertising will change that.

“There’s nothing you can do to remove that stigma because the stigma comes from what is the destruction of human life,” said Eric Scheidler, executive director of the Pro-Life

Action League, a national group based in Chicago. “No abortion rhetoric is going to change the basic injustice of abortion.”

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