

LOCAL ABORTION RIVALS UNFAZED BY MASS. CASE

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Despite the shootings at two abortion clinics in Massachusetts, local pro-life and pro-choice advocates indicated Friday that they'd continue business as usual.

David Crane learned of the shootings when he got back from picketing the Peninsula Medical Center for Women in Newport News, **Riverside Regional Medical Center** and the office of a Newport News obstetrician-gynecologist associated with the hospital.

"It appears that there are people out there willing to respond to the deadly force being used against the unborn," said Crane, the director of Virginia Citizens for Justice, a Norfolk-based pro-life group. "They're responding with the same degree of force to defend these children."

Crane said he sympathized with and understood the logic behind the impulse.

But his organization remains committed to "peaceful intervention," he said.

Violence is a reaction by "people who feel diplomatic channels have been exhausted," Crane explained. But he believes his organization's "free speech" activities have been effective in the struggle.

A doctor associated with Hillcrest Clinic in Norfolk resigned in September, citing harassment by anti-abortionists as part of the reason. Michael Girtelschmid, who performed abortions at Hillcrest for three years before his resignation, had been the subject of a "wanted" poster issued by Crane's group, then called Operation Rescue Virginia. Girtelschmid was being picketed at home and at his office. He wore a bulletproof vest and carried a gun to work.

But Suzette Caton, director of community relations for Hillcrest, said few staff members have left out of fear.

Caton was the subject of a recently issued "wanted" poster. It identifies her as "guilty of conspiring with abortionists in the killing of thousands of innocent children" and features her picture, home address and phone number.

"We've had a bombing. We've had an arson and a clinic invasion in the last 10 years," Caton noted.

"You feel very vulnerable and concerned about your safety," especially since the murder of David Gunn in Florida two years ago, she admitted. The concern has "probably risen with each additional murder since then."

"But we've adjusted security over the years," Caton said. "We've increased security measures." She wasn't comfortable elaborating on the specifics.

"At this point, I feel very strongly about providing quality care, and I plan to continue doing that," she said.

Sarah Forbes, the Newport News doctor that Crane picketed Friday, said she had no idea why she'd been selected.

Forbes hadn't seen the picketers; she'd only heard about them. She was too busy with patient care to pay them any mind, Forbes said.

"I think this is really quite unfair. I don't know what their problem is," she said. "They certainly haven't taken into account the diligence we have taken to save lives."

Forbes said she's been in practice for more than 30 years and has brought "countless" babies into the world. Abortions represent a tiny fraction of all the surgeries she performs, let alone of all her patient contacts, she stressed.

Forbes said she would perform an abortion only when it was "in the best interest of the patient, physically and emotionally." That won't change, she said.

"It's sad. It's really sad," she said about the escalating violence. "We should all try to be kinder."

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