

# Pro-choice rally in the Pit expected to attract much support

By CHRISTINA NIFONG  
Staff Writer

It's a pep rally for choice. It's a celebration inviting students and other concerned citizens to listen to speakers, see the stars and register to vote.

On Friday, April 6, the pit will be brimming with onlookers, and if all goes as planned, these onlookers will become on-doers, working to keep abortion legal in the United States.

This rally is being held to let people know that being pro-choice is important, said Polly Guthrie, chairwoman of Activating Awareness for Choice and Equality (AACE). "Elections are coming up," she said. "We want to encourage people to vote."

AACE is an independent student organization, started last year, that focuses mainly on women's rights activities. Guthrie said it had a mailing list of 250 people which included men and women, students, faculty and staff.

AACE is co-sponsoring the rally with the Hollywood Policy Center (HPC), an organization of people in the entertainment industry who work on social justice issues, said Margery Tabankin, a board member of the HPC.

"It's Hollywood's response to the country. We wanted to show that Ronald Reagan wasn't all that Hollywood had to offer," she said.

According to Tabankin, the HPC has the power to do things that are different because of the nature of the institution.

By networking celebrities, it can be helpful to people working on issues at the grassroots level.

"We have the ability to communicate with America," Tabankin said. Directors of television shows like "China Beach" and "thirtysomething" work with the center, organizing people to go on the road. The center also has a research facility that investigates and keeps on top of various issues.

The HPC gives support to student groups, letting them know that their actions matter. Tabankin said, "We want to make it known that if you care about choice, now's the time to speak up."

AACE and the HPC joined when the policy center decided to conduct a specific campus tour to eight college campuses to raise voter registration. Tabankin said the HPC received requests from campuses all over the country, and they chose UNC mainly because of its active student group. Guthrie said another reason the rally will be here is that North Carolina is a political hotspot for the abortion issue.

The rally will allow students an opportunity to fill out pledge cards to send to their congressmen stating their stance on abortion. If Congressmen know how their constituents feel, they may change their agenda, Guthrie said.

Charlie Duncan, an advance person from San Francisco, will accompany the stars on this tour. Duncan works on political campaigns in California and

on the national level; his most recent client was Michael Dukakis.

"When celebrities are involved in a public event, it gets complicated," Duncan said.

He has also worked with other pro-choice groups, and he says he will not work for an anti-abortion organization or a candidate that he does not believe in. "You can't work as hard as we do on anything unless your heart's in it."

Rallies like these are important to Duncan because he can help lend a voice to student organizations, he said. "Student organizations are popping up every day," he said. "It's important to support their efforts."

Duncan said celebrities are powerful tools and positive forces that help to increase awareness, especially for those students who may be on the fringes of their notoriety," he said.

The goals of the rally, he said, were to excite people, to influence them to join student organizations and to get them to vote. The celebrities are a key part in attaining these goals, because momentum builds in the days before the event, climaxes during the rally and leaves memories of the event behind.

Mary Sheriff, faculty adviser for AACE, said she hoped that through the rally, students would learn to play active roles in society. "Don't sit back and let others decide for you — argue for a certain point of view. That is what

this system is all about."

She said that AACE was on an educational mission, and she wanted students to know that the cumulative effect of everyone working together gives them power. Her message is: Your vote does count, don't feel insignificant.

Anti-abortion activist Mary Lou White said she was afraid students would get caught up in the charisma of celebrities. "I hope people continue to really think about the heart of the issue," she said.

White worked as director of client services at Pregnancy Support Services for four and one-half years and now is active in the Durham/Chapel Hill pro-life network. She said that although she knew of anti-abortion rallies in the past, she tended not to get as involved with them because they were often political. Her opinion on abortion is not political, she said.

White participates in 'sidewalk counseling,' which she described as talking to women as they go into clinics and giving them information about abortions and alternatives.

She usually chooses clinics where there are no picketers because women going into clinics are scared, and picketers make them feel threatened, she said.

Demonstrators outside clinics are trying to get a message across, she said. They are saying, 'Look what's going on; this is wrong.' They are there to

educate the public and to raise awareness.

She added that picketing is not helpful because it boils down to the fact that two groups are working out their controversy at the expense of the women they are trying to help.

"I've seen behavior on both sides that I don't feel good about," she said. "I don't like it when people stand outside of clinics and yell: 'Murderer, murderer, murderer!' That's not helpful."

But when an escort yanks anti-abortion literature out of women's hands, that's harassment too, she said. "I've been pushed and hit. Things get tense."

White said if women wanted to talk and she offered help, that is not harassment. "If a woman says no — I say okay."

Karen Kolbinsky is one of the six people that started New Beginnings, a crisis pregnancy center in Hillsborough. She said it started last year and is a place for girls who are pregnant and feel hardship. It offers anything needed for a newborn baby: housing, clothing, cribs and emotional support.

It is not an organization established to protest, but it does not prohibit its members from protesting. Kolbinsky said her husband was more active in protesting, while she writes letters and editorials. "We pray a lot. We're aiming at changing attitudes," she said.

Harassment is not something that Kolbinsky said she endorses in any way. "That is not what I believe is a way to reach people." Demonstrations at clinics that she has seen involve anti-

abortion activists praying, singing and holding up signs.

She has experienced some harassment, though. "People call us names, curse at us; someone tried to run us down in their car," she said.

"My goal in protesting is to bring attention to the fact that there are innocent human beings being murdered — I know what abortion is; I've seen aborted fetuses," Kolbinsky said.

She said many girls did not know what they were doing when they had an abortion. "They don't know what's inside of them until they see an eight-week child in the womb." It has hands and feet, she said.

Guthrie said, however, that the burden of harassment is on the anti-abortion demonstrators. She has escorted women at clinics and been called a Satan worshipper. "We did not engage with the protesters at all," she said.

She said trying to get people to change their minds after they have made a difficult decision is the worst part of clinic demonstrating. "It's completely indefensible."

Picketing is not harassment, Guthrie said. It is an expression of First Amendment rights. "But they don't just picket," she said. Making women feel evil and sinful for their decision is not an effective way to voice your disagreement, she said.

Duncan said, "Anytime you get together (members of) one side of an emotional issue, you are bound to have people from the other side. There could be an incident. But this is our window — our time to talk."

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