

# Indiana Weekly.

## Floyds Knobs man battles abortion with billboards, Bible verses



BY BUD KRAFT, SPECIAL TO THE COURIER-JOURNAL

John De Friend, right, stood near one of his billboards with Dan Scholl, vice president of Catholics for Children, a non-profit group that oversees the billboard campaign.

By CYNTHIA SCHULTZ  
Special to The Courier-Journal

It was five years ago that anti-abortion billboards began popping up along interstates and other highways in the area.

The mastermind behind them is John De Friend, 63, a Floyds Knobs resident who hoped the Scripture-laced messages, on life — and the images of Christ and unborn babies — would heighten awareness.

In 1995, he hired Infinity Outdoor, formerly Outdoor Systems, to put up 40 billboards. It was supposed to be for that year, said De Friend, who runs Friendly Foods, a home-based fairty-broker and distributing company. "But it took off the first year and kept growing."

Today, the campaign, called Billboards for Life, has evolved into an annual fall event with 100 to 150 billboards carrying anti-abortion messages for about three months.

Some of the biblically based

messages include these words of Jesus Christ: "Father, forgive them . . ." and "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you."

Catholics for Children, a group he founded, has "done three-quarters of a million dollars' worth of anti-abortion messages," De Friend said. The group includes a dozen parishioners of St. Martin of Tours Catholic Church in Louisville, as well as others.

In 1994, De Friend took his billboard idea to the Rev. Dennis Cousens, pastor of St. Martin, where De Friend is a member. Cousens was impressed and mailed letters to other parishes in the Archdiocese of Louisville to ask for money.

Knights of Columbus councils also got involved, as well as individuals. Today, eight to 10 councils on both sides of the Ohio River donate.

"We want hearts to be moved and minds changed," said De Friend, noting alternatives to abortion, such as adop-

tion. Each billboard lists the phone number of Pregnancy Resource Center, a private crisis-pregnancy center.

"The messages are clear . . . and easy to read while driving," Cousens said. They are done in "a powerful way, but not in a judgmental way. We have gotten feedback," such as a woman who chose to have her baby after seeing a billboard message.

Delores Murphy, a volunteer with the Pregnancy Resource Center, said the billboards are making a difference.

"We get a lot of phone calls" from pregnant women. "It's usually an emergency kind of situation — someone is desperate. They look up and see that Christian symbol . . . It's like the billboard itself is reaching out to them."

De Friend spends many Sundays visiting parishes seeking money for the billboards, Cousens said.

Smaller billboards have been

erected on private land, said De Friend. He said there are 18 in three Kentucky counties.

More recently, parishioners at St. Joseph Catholic Church in Marengo put up a billboard. It cost \$750 and sits on the church's 10 acres with a double-sided message that can be seen from Ind. 66.

"We are the only Catholic church in Crawford County. We thought we should put our money where our mouth is," said member Bernie Beam.

St. Joseph's pastor, the Rev. Frederick Denison, said, "A couple of other churches have expressed an interest" in signs.

Joan Smith, an anti-abortion advocate from Jeffersonville who founded St. Elizabeth's Southern Indiana Regional Maternity Center in New Albany, knows and admires De Friend.

She said: "Maybe it's the quiet, still voice of the unborn child" that touches people.



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