

Decision on abortion still divides Santa Cruz County after 20 years

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SANTA CRUZ — One of the most famous, divisive and emotional U.S. Supreme Court rulings turns 20 this week.

For two decades, *Roe vs. Wade* has been the guiding light of pro-choice advocates and the scorn of abortion opponents.

"For women, it is probably the most significant ruling, ..." said Carol Fuller, chairwoman of the Reproductive Rights Network of Santa Cruz County. "The case is a major breakthrough for women. Without the ability to control your own reproductive life, you can control very little else."

The decision, which gave women the right to legal abortions, was so enormous many even recall where they were when news of the ruling broke.

Beatriz Lopez-Flores, director of the UC Santa Cruz Women's Center, was a sophomore at UC Riverside and president of Associated Women Students on Jan. 22, 1973.

As news of *Roe vs. Wade* spread

through campus, a celebration broke out in the student center.

"We were so happy," she recalled.

Edith Manchester, one of Santa Cruz County's leading anti-abortion crusaders, said she first learned about the ruling in the late 1970s and has since fought to overturn it.

"It's a violent act that kills a baby," Manchester said.

On the 20th anniversary of the decision, she will travel to the state Capitol for a pro-life rally.

The intensity of the issue nationwide can be seen in a quick review of some of the activities that occurred last year in Santa Cruz.

Three months ago, more than 200 local pro-life supporters formed a "life chain" along Ocean Street while 70 pro-choice advocates waved "Keep Abortion Legal" signs.

The Santa Cruz City Council discussed a law that would require anyone within 100 feet of a health-care facility to back away at least eight feet from people who ask them to.

In February, the county Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to join Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania in its challenge of abortion restrictions in that state.

In June, pro-choice supporters gathered at the county courthouse in the rain to protest a Supreme Court decision weakening a woman's right to abortion.

The coming years, both sides agree, will be critical as *Roe vs. Wade* hangs by a mere vote.

In 1992, the court in a 5-4 decision said women have a constitutional right to abortion, but substantially weakened the 1973 landmark ruling.

"We needed one more vote," Manchester said. "... We're not giving up."

Abortion-rights advocates also say they will work hard in the next several years to strengthen *Roe vs. Wade* especially now that they have a pro-choice president in the White House.

"There is 12 years of erosion of *Roe vs. Wade* to undo," Fuller said.