

Abortion foes picket maternity center

By ERIN K. QUIRK

Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Anti-abortion protesters earned waves, honks and obscene gestures from motorists on Soquel Drive Saturday, as they demonstrated in front of the soon-to-be-opened Sutter Surgery and Maternity Center.

Approximately 125 men, women and children held signs reading "Sutter, the late term abortion center" and "Abortion Kills Children." Protesters waved back at drivers who expressed their opinions on the protest with a thumbs up or thumbs down, or merely a single middle finger.

"It's a good opportunity to let the community know what they will be doing inside that building," said Lighthouse Christian Fellowship pastor Mark Toback who was there with his 11 year-old son Joshua. "At one end of the hall they'll be saving premature babies and at the other they'll be terminating them."

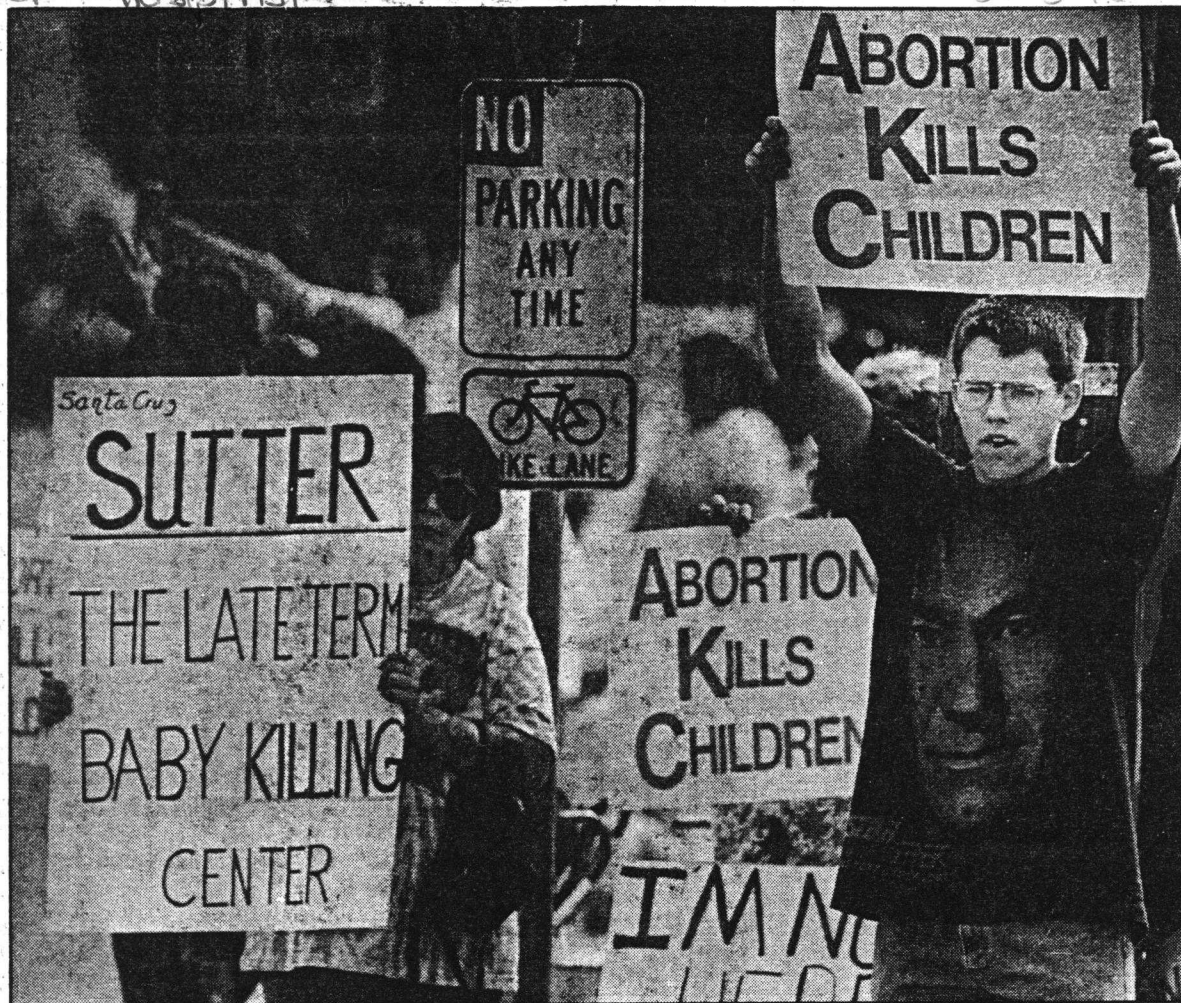
Sutter officials were unavailable for comment Saturday, but according to Sentinel files, spokesman Bill Gleeson has said, abortion will be one of 500 procedures offered by the center. It will operate primarily as a birthing facility.

Rev. Dale Wegner, president of Voice for Life, who organized Saturday's protest, said the absence of abortion-rights protesters was intentional. The notice of Saturday's protest went out through local churches and not through the media.

"We're here to speak for those who can't speak. This isn't a debate. The debate was over 10 years ago when they determined it is not just a blob of tissue," Wenger said.

Wenger also came out Saturday to protest what he called "Suttergate," or the center's alleged "distancing" from first-trimester abortions.

According to Sentinel files, the center will perform tubal ligations and second-trimester abortions if the doctor and patient



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Sylvia Stuart and David Lohnes were among the protesters at Sutter Health and Maternity Center Saturday.

deem it necessary. Sutter officials have said first-trimester abortions will not be preformed at the new center because "those are typically undertaken in clinics or doctors offices," the files said.

But Wenger said, two years ago, Sutter Health purchased the Santa Cruz Medical Clinic — which he said the anti-abortion group Voice for Life picketed 6 years ago for performing first-trimester abortions.

"It's Sutter doctors in Sutter clinics," Wenger said.

Women are being exploited by the anti-abortion advocates," said Edith Manchester, 72, one of the protesters Saturday and a former Voice for Life president.

"When abortion is not an option, women work out alternatives," she said. "There is a lot of pressure on women to have an abortion, when they really don't want to. It's wonderful for irresponsible men, and it's the women that must suffer," said Manchester.

Monte Vista Christian students

also joined in the protest waving "Sutter — The Late Term Baby Killing Center" signs. Monte Vista High School freshman Emily Chalmers, 15, said she was earning extra credit from one of her classes for turning out. Chalmers was joined by other students who each earned 100 points extra credit in their economics class for their participation.

The students said, however, they would have come to the protest even without the incentive.