

# Nuns Win Battle Against Strip Club Next to Convent

Monday afternoon, the Missionary Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo Scalabrinians and community residents in Stone Park, Ill., celebrated victory in preventing a strip club, called Get It, from opening next to the convent.

The \$3 million club was planned to open just steps away from the convent, despite the presence of children and others who find the adult entertainment facility offensive.

The group of nuns and community members, along with PASO: West Suburban Action Project—a social justice organization—organized a grassroots campaign that resulted in a 500-people vigil in Stone Park. It was the largest public demonstration in the town's history.

The campaign collected more than 3,000 signed petitions against the strip club and received international, national and local media attention. The community sent a resounding message: "Get It, Get Out!" And they accomplished keeping it out. The group plans to file a lawsuit to ensure that the strip club remains shut.

"We came together as a community, as people of faith, and stood together fighting for family values against what some thought was an unbreakable giant," Sister Noemia Silva, one of the missionary sisters, said at a press conference Monday. "But just as David fought and triumphed over Goliath, we too stand here today proud of overcoming the impossible. We will continue to stand for a safe and healthy Stone Park that respects family values and the integrity of each person."

In April 2010, the developer of Get It sued the village of Stone Park, accusing its officials of shaking him down for cash and part-ownership of the club in exchange for permission

to build the facility. The village settled the lawsuit in August 2010.

Even though the village's ordinances were largely unchallenged by the lawsuit, the village agreed to repeal or amend numerous ordinances as part of the settlement agreement, ending that lawsuit. In particular, the village agreed to repeal a local ordinance—similar to the state statute—that imposed a 1,000-foot buffer zone between adult entertainment facilities and schools, parks, churches and residential areas.

At the press conference, one of the convent's nuns called on Stone Park Mayor Beniamino Mazzulla and village officials to enforce the state law.

"The convent is located just a few feet from the strip club," Silva noted. "If they will not enforce the law, then we call on the village of Stone Park to allow the courts to rule on the law before letting this strip club open. If you truly stand for the well-being of this community and its families, either enforce the law or support this lawsuit."

The Thomas More Society has been working with the nuns to shut down the strip club. Peter Breen, executive director of the society, spoke about the 1,000-foot law.

"The Illinois law that provides a 1,000-foot buffer zone around places of worship from strip clubs is clear, valid and constitutional. This sort of law has been enforced repeatedly by courts across the country, and our Illinois law has been enforced by at least one downstate court and even been upheld on appeal.

"The 1,000-foot buffer also extends into Melrose Park, protecting the people of Melrose Park too. If the village of Stone Park does not heed the call of the sisters to enforce the buffer law, we are ready with a diverse coalition of individuals and organizations to seek relief from the courts."

PASO executive director Yesenia Sanchez said the organization is proud to stand with the sisters and the community members “who courageously stood up to uphold the family and community values that are core to a healthy and vibrant community.”

She continued, “We applaud you for your work and will continue to stand with you in this struggle. And to any potential buyers of this strip club, learn from Get It’s mistake. A strip club in this location is and will be a bad investment. This community is ready and organized!”

Pat Zito, resident of Melrose Park, Ill., for 45 years, has also been impacted by this strip club and is glad to see its plans thwarted.

“I raised my children in this community,” Zito stated. “And though I live in Melrose Park, my rights are also being infringed by this strip club. My children were concerned for my safety if this place opened, for what it would bring. I am proud to stand with the sisters in this struggle and that we were victorious over vulgarity.”