

KATHERINE LAMBERT, COURTESY MILLION MOM MARCH (BOTTOM)



GUNS

Don't Mess With the Moms

The 'soccer moms' are rallying for gun control—and their march on Washington will echo in November

BY MATT BAI



BETSY STORM HAS never lost a child to a gunshot. She's never been the victim of violence herself. But she's had enough. The mother of two in a tony Chicago suburb, Storm remembers clearly the day in 1988 that Laurie Dann walked into nearby Hubbard Woods Elementary School and shot six students, one fatally. She saw the same tragedy play out in Paducah, Jonesboro, Littleton, Granada Hills. The 46-year-old Storm never knew what to do about it until she read a blurb online about the Million Mom March. Then she began

tacking up fliers in schools, churches and synagogues, hoping to get enough women together for a bus to Washington. Last week Storm managed to fill the last of her bus's 57 seats with determined women. "There are many more mothers than there are gun lobbyists," she says. "You can't mess with a million mothers trying to protect their families."

More than 100,000 ordinary moms will spend this Mother's Day at the Mall—as in Lincoln and Jefferson, not Baby Gap. Even more—perhaps a million in all—will march in local demonstrations against gun violence in more than 60 cities. Their message to Congress: give us new gun laws, or suffer in November. The emergence of guns as a

Breaking point: A shooting at a community center outraged organizer Dees-Thomases

key issue for suburban women—"soccer moms" like Betsy Storm—marks a pivotal moment for the gun-control movement. And it could be a major challenge for George W. Bush, who spent much of last week trying to explain his friendship with the National Rifle Association while Al Gore hammered away at him. The country is still divided over whether new gun laws are needed, but a Pew Research poll last month found that 66 percent of Americans—and 73 percent of women—think gun control is more important than gun rights. This time, unlike election years past, it may just be the one issue that decides their votes.

It used to be that suburban moms rallied over abortion rights or public education, but not gun violence; most of that was confined to the cities. The school shootings changed all that. Donna Dees-Thomases, a 42-year-old mother of two, reached her breaking point when she watched the footage of small children running from their Granada Hills, Calif., day-care center last August. A week later Dees-Thomases—the sister-in-law of Clinton friend Susan Thomases—applied for a permit for 10,000 people to march on the Capitol.

The idea caught on, boosted by celebrities like Rosie O'Donnell, and a hastily assembled Web site. (Never mind that the first home page accidentally featured a photo of the Supreme Court rather than the Capitol.) The marchers have sold more than \$100,000 in T-shirts off the Web, at \$25 each, and 13 cities have scheduled their own marches in the last two weeks. In the San Francisco Bay Area, working mothers find time to plan by logging onto the Web from 9 p.m. to midnight. In a Sacramento retirement home, women in their 80s have signed on to take a bus to the nearest rally.

Not all mothers have rallied. A lot of black moms in the inner cities resented the sudden passion of white suburban women—after decades of urban killings that garnered little outrage. Dees-Thomases and her organizers won some of them over by apologizing up front. Last fall Dees-Thomases called New York Police Lt. Eric Adams, leader of a group calling itself 100 Blacks in Law Enforcement Who Care, after she saw him on TV. She told Adams that her suburban moms needed to "atone" for not speaking out earlier. "Better late than never," Adams said. His group sponsored a bus.

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