

Angels on the watch

By CHRIS SUGRUE

VOLUNTEER anti-crime street patrollers are ready to reinforce safety in the eastern suburbs.

The Guardian Angels have established a worldwide network of chapters that now include Waitakere City and other New Zealand neighbourhoods are following suite.

Organiser Andy Cawston says they'll venture into Auckland's east if they are invited.

Mr Cawston says the New York originating Angels' conspicuous and sometimes maligned red beret and white T-shirt uniform is intended to announce their presence on the beat.

"We're an unarmed foot patrol and we dress that way so people can see us. Our focus is violent crime, but if we see car theft or graffiti underway, we'll certainly intervene to put a stop to it," explains Mr Cawston, who says he witnessed the Angels' effectiveness before moving from Vancouver.

"Where you have people who are watching – people who are very conspicuous, it tends to deter crime."

Tamaki Makaurau MP Dr Pita Sharples recently expressed his concern about martial arts training chapter members receive. Dr Sharples also described the Guardian Angels as "vigilante citizen police".

"We use our communication skills as our primary means of interaction," says Mr Cawston.

"But we'd be foolish to go into harm's way without being able to look after ourselves."

He adds members are also trained in first aid, including CPR.

Mr Cawston says an Angels' chapter should be created before crime becomes "too big a problem to handle".

He doesn't believe Guardian Angels step on the toes of police or volunteer neighbourhood patrol groups.

"Organisations like Neighbourhood Watch and the Maori Wardens have a role to play. But the problem of crime is sufficiently large that there's plenty of room for all kind of players and contributors."

Waitakere police are taking a "wait and see" approach to the Angels.

Mr Cawston has two senior American Guardian Angels accompanying his chapter's baby steps and there's every likelihood more chapters could appear throughout the country.

"The intention is that wherever people feel they have a need for Guardian Angels that's where we'll go.

"If we get enough interest in Manukau we'll set something up."

Botany Community Board member and Botany Crime Watch patroller Trevor Armstrong knows little about the Guardian Angels but says the area could certainly do with more vigilant citizens monitoring the streets.