



Palmerston North man sets up angel patrol

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By BRITTON BROUN

A store owner is set to take to the streets with New Zealand's second chapter of the American safety patrol Guardian Angels.

To Shing, 39, of Palmerston North, said he decided to join the Guardian Angels in January after thefts from his clothing store and an argument with another shop owner that ended in his shop window being broken last year.

After hearing about the Guardian Angels in the media he called the Auckland branch, only to find out there were no others in New Zealand – so he started his own. "People are concerned about safety but many don't know what they can do. This provides a framework for people to get involved. The main thing is we stop bad people committing crime before they start," he said.

The Guardian Angels were founded in the Bronx in 1979 by McDonald's night manager Curtis Sliwa. And what started with his sending employees to escort people home has since spread to nine countries.

Angels learn self-defence, martial arts, how to deal with conflict, how to administer first aid and give directions.

Mr Shing is still being trained – working his way through the Angels' 500-page manual – but already has two volunteer recruits. Right now they just keep a watchful eye as they go about their daily business, but as they recruit more members the group will don the Guardian Angels trademark red beret and jacket and start night patrols.

Mr Shing said it was not all about fighting, but creating a safe environment by making residents take responsibility for their community. "If something happens in a shop or on the street you call police but it takes them a while to get there. If someone's already in the street they can step in."

But police are not so sure Palmerston North needs another community safety group.

Area commander Inspector Pat Handcock said the city already had an excellent network of groups working with police and the city council.

"Whether they're trained in martial arts or not, the question is do we need a level of vigilantism in Palmerston North? The answer is `no'," he said.

Existing local groups include Neighbourhood Watch, the Palmerston North Safe City Trust whose members patrol the square and cbd at weekends, and another volunteer organisation, the Community Patrols of New Zealand.

Mr Handcock said the Guardian Angels would have to talk to local police before they started street patrols.

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