

## Guardian Angels are prepared to watch over us

24 May 2006

### **Crimefighting volunteers the Guardian Angels will patrol in eastern Manukau if the community asks for their help.**

Members say they'll go where they are needed but that crime rates in the area might not justify their presence.

Howick residents, who go by code names Alpha One and Phoenix, have been patrolling with the west Auckland chapter for four months.

"We feel that we need to go into Manukau because we need to keep the whole community safe. Right now it's quite dangerous," Phoenix says.

Their phone has "run hot" with volunteers from south Auckland after plans to expand into the area were publicised, he says.

"If we have enough volunteers for the eastern side we will start an eastern chapter," he says.

"If the community needs us, if they ask for our presence, we will be there."

Both Angels attended a recent public meeting on violence in Highland Park but they don't believe the level of crime is particularly high.

"I can understand the concerns of the local community but some of those incidents were isolated," Phoenix says.

Guardian Angels were established in 1979 and now operate in 13 countries. The first New Zealand chapter started last year.

Members patrol in groups of four to six, including a team leader, a medic and a communications person.

They contact police about any crime or suspicious activity but are prepared to get involved if needed.

They follow a code of conduct for dealing with dangerous situations and have procedures to keep each other safe.

Members have a three-month training period, during which they can patrol in plain clothes.

"We work by a charter that has strict guidelines," Alpha One says.

"We do prepare ourselves in case an altercation does happen but we're not vigilantes. We don't go out looking for it, we just go out prepared."

Phoenix says Guardian Angel patrols fill a gap that groups like Crimewatch Patrol don't cover.

"There's a lot of stuff they don't see. We go into dark alleyways, into nooks and crannies.

"The police are doing their best but there are not enough of them. Maori wardens are doing a wonderful job but they're also under-resourced."

Police eastern area commander inspector Jim Searle says the Guardian Angels have not approached police for support.

"We do not support vigilante groups but do support community involvement in crime prevention," he says.

"If we were approached by the group we would offer them advice on acceptable actions in accordance with the law."