



OAKLAND: GUARDIAN ANGELS PATROL GRAND LAKE AREA

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The Guardian Angels came to Oakland today to start patrolling the Grand Lake neighborhood near Lake Merritt, which has been hit by an increase in holdups and break-ins.

Erick Wong, the Guardian Angels' California regional director, said Guardian Angels volunteers and residents met at 11 a.m. today in front of the Grand Lake Theater and began walking around the area.

The group, which originated in the Bronx nearly 30 years ago, came to Oakland at the request of a neighborhood crime watch organization.

Wong, who is based in San Diego, said he and other Guardian Angels officials plan to recruit and train Oakland residents to join their organization and begin patrolling the area on their own.

A new Oakland chapter was formed today and will remain in operation "as long as people want us and as long as there's a need," he said.

Wong said the Guardian Angels would conduct patrols at night in an attempt to protect local residents.

He said the idea is to be "a visual deterrent" by having a presence in high-crime areas.

Wong said volunteers could intervene in violent incidents if they're needed by making citizens arrests, or by calling in Oakland police.

Wong said the Guardian Angels also would be going to the Rockridge District in Oakland this weekend at the request of local residents to help in fighting crime there as well.

Oakland City Councilwoman Pat Kernighan, who represents the Grand Lake area, said she doesn't know much about the Guardian Angels but hopes that they will help fight crime by "providing more eyes and ears on the streets."

Kernighan said, "Oakland does have a very serious problem with street robberies" and the problem is even worse in other neighborhoods.

She said that in 2006 robberies increased by 24 percent citywide and by 40 percent in her district.

Kernighan said the fact that the Guardian Angels has come to Oakland to fight crime shouldn't be seen as a negative comment on the efforts of the Oakland Police Department in fighting the robbery problem.

"They're working hard on it, but the real question is that there aren't enough officers and they're spread relatively thin," Kernighan said.

In a related anti-crime effort, Oakland Mayor Ron Dellums, City Council President Ignacio De La Fuente and Police Chief Wayne Tucker will walk with local merchants and residents along International Boulevard in East Oakland beginning at 5:30 p.m. today.

A community meeting starting at 7 p.m. at the Bridges Academy will follow the walk, which begins at International Boulevard and 38th Avenue.

In a statement, Dellums said, "When I met with Latino merchants in late February they expressed their concern to me about crime and violence along East 14th Street (also known as International Boulevard) from High Street to the 30's."

Dellums said, "We have worked together over the last several months and I look forward to walking with my fellow Oakland residents as well as joining them to strategize about solutions."