

## City rolls out red carpet for Angels

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Police Chief Francisco Ortiz addresses reporters Monday as Curtis Sliwa, center, and Mayor John DeStefano Jr. look on.

**NEW HAVEN** — A group of Guardian Angels met with the mayor and police chief Monday about the group's presence in the Edgewood neighborhood and will continue the safety patrols with the city's blessing.

"Our view in the Police Department and the city is community policing involves eyes and ears on the street other than police. The police can't do this on their own," said Mayor John DeStefano Jr., standing with Angel founder Curtis Sliwa, police Chief Francisco Ortiz and police Commissioner Rick Epstein in the latest stop for the media-savvy Sliwa and his red beret-wearing Guardian Angels.

Sliwa and a contingent of colleagues arrived in New Haven last week at the invitation of influential Rabbi Daniel Greer and others in the Edgewood neighborhood, who had blasted police ineffectiveness and started their own armed "defense patrol."

On Monday, it was city officials standing next to the charismatic founder of the international anti-crime group to talk about community and partnerships like Block Watch and community management teams that work hand-in-hand with police.

It was in that same spirit, DeStefano said, that police would work with the Guardian Angels, whose members will coordinate locally with police District Manager Steve Shea, who oversees the Edgewood neighborhood.

Since his arrival, Sliwa has been a vocal presence in the city and local media with his Bronx-born histrionics.

At news conferences, he churned out theatrical turns of phrase, referring to hard-core criminals as "the Uzi-toting, dope-sucking, psychopathic killing machines" and pledging, if bad guys cross the line, to "slam 'em and jam 'em and they'll suck some concrete" until police arrive.

On Monday, Sliwa was more measured, pledging to work closely with police and try to convince his hosts to disarm. In the meeting, which was closed to the media, he said he tried to convey to the city administration the understandable concerns that the Edgewood Park Defense Patrol had about safety.

"These are men who did not grow up watching Bronson in 'Death Wish,'" said Sliwa, referring to the 1974 movie starring Charles Bronson about a New York accountant turned vigilante.

At the same time, he said, he also would continue to try to convince the gun-toting defense patrol that "our way, the unarmed way, is the better way, the safer way."

After the hour-long meeting with Sliwa, police Chief Francisco Ortiz Jr. said the Guardian Angels "certainly have the strong support of the Police Department."

Over the last week, the armed patrols by the Edgewood group have been roundly criticized by city officials worried about safety, black leaders worried about racial profiling and Jewish leaders concerned about black-Jew tensions the patrols might spawn.

Eliezer Greer, son of Daniel Greer, has been adamant that the patrols are not a case of the Orthodox Jews patrolling to protect their own, but rather an inclusive, multi-racial effort to save a community that isn't getting enough attention from police. Some members of the patrol have state pistol permits and carry licensed, concealed weapons.

It started after Daniel Greer's other son, Rabbi Dov Greer, was accosted and attacked June 10 outside his house by youths. In the days afterward, the Greers started armed patrols and were sharply criticized by the chief and Police Department.

There hasn't been a lot of apparent direct contact since then, at least that people are acknowledging. After leaving police headquarters, the Guardian Angels departed for Edgewood to meet with the defense patrol.

Eliezer Greer said the group is continually reevaluating the patrol and whether it should be armed, but he added people should not lose sight of what led the group to arm itself.

"It's an issue that's being re-evaluated several times daily to be honest with you, but that has nothing to do with how we got there. The bottom line is we're still at the point where we were before last Sunday night."

And that's that the Police Department under Ortiz has failed the city, he said, and a lot of people's eyes across the city now are opening to that.

Ortiz Monday said he has an enormous amount of respect for the Greers but he and DeStefano affirmed their opposition to armed citizens patrolling the streets.

Last week, the city sent over two cell phones, DeStefano said, figuring carrying phones to contact police was a better alternative than a loaded pistol.