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## Guardian Angels canvass Springfield neighborhood for recruits

By **Associated Press**

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**S**PRINGFIELD - The Guardian Angels canvassed the city's South End neighborhood Thursday looking for volunteers to create a local chapter of their New York-based community watch group.

Wearing their trademark red jackets and matching berets, a few members of the unarmed volunteer group stopped along Main Street to talk with residents about neighborhood crime and safety.

"We provide a safe environment so people feel like they could walk around the neighborhood without any trouble," said Tony Rivera.

Rivera - who also goes by the nickname "Dangerous Grounds" - said that along with alerting police to bad behavior, the group's tactics include confronting and restraining people they think are breaking the law until police arrive.

While Rivera and some others were passing out fliers in the neighborhood and explaining that they'll train people in CPR, community surveillance and martial arts, Police Commissioner Edward Flynn was meeting with Arnaldo Salinas, one of the Guardian Angels' directors.

"We had a positive discussion and we look forward to hearing from him again," said Flynn's chief of staff, Jennifer Flagg.

During the meeting, Salinas asked for the police department's help in training recruits, Flagg said. She said police officials would work with the Guardian Angels and make sure they understand the legal parameters of what "citizens can and cannot do."

"We're pleased that he asked for our assistance," she said. "It sounds like he's saying all of the right things."

If there's enough community interest, Rivera said a Springfield chapter could be in place within three months.

"We need help in this neighborhood," said Patrick Jean. The unemployed 26-year-old said he would consider joining the Guardian Angels after one of the members spoke with him in front of a Dunkin' Donuts. "Their message is positive. They could help us save lives and get people on track."

The Guardian Angels were invited to Springfield by city council candidate John Lysak. He said the Guardian Angels could help serve as an extra set of eyes to the police department, which he says is already stretched thin because of a tight budget.

"We only go where we're called," Rivera said. "But if we see something, we get involved. We don't just watch."

In March, the Guardian Angels returned to a crime-plagued Boston neighborhood, ending a 15-year absence from Boston that was triggered by lack of community support in the early 1990s.

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