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Guardian Angels could start KCK branch

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By NICK SLOAN, Kansan Staff Writer

Members of the Guardian Angels said the time for action is now if a branch of the neighborhood watch-type program is to be established in Kansas City, Kan.

The crime-fighting group, which visited KCK last month, spoke to interested community members from KCK and Kansas City, Mo., Tuesday evening at Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church.

The Guardian Angels are seeking to establish chapters in both cities.



"Our goal here is to try and make a difference," said Frank Lee, a group member. "Are the Guardian Angels able to solve everything? Absolutely not. But we will be a tool for those in the community who want to make a difference."

Founded by Curtis Sliwa, the group has expanded to over 60 chapters worldwide after beginning with a membership of 13 in the late 1970s.

Last month, the group patrolled a few blocks in KCK, and they were planning to do it again on Thursday night. The group will meet at 7 p.m. near 12th and Minnesota. The group will also patrol 35th and Prospect Friday evening in Kansas City, Mo., and will return to KCK on Saturday evening.

Jack Holland, a Guardian Angel partnering with Lee in establishing the Kansas City chapters, said individuals have a basic right to patrol neighborhoods.

"It's a constitutional right," Holland said. "You don't have to have the support from politicians or the mayor. As long as you follow the rules, it is your basic right."

Although the KCK Police Department doesn't endorse the group, they seem to agree with that premise.

"The KCK Police Department is taking a neutral position on the Guardian Angels coming to KCK," read a statement from the department. "This is not an initiative that the Police Department has any involvement in - it is a community initiative. If the community feels that starting a chapter of the Guardian Angels in their respective neighborhoods will make them feel safer and will deter crime, then we wish the program great success."

Guardian Angel Frank Lee spoke to a crowd at Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church in Kansas City, Kan., Tuesday evening. The Guardian Angels, a New York-based citizens' patrol unit, is looking to establish branches in both KCK and Kansas City, Mo. Kansan photo by **NICK SLOAN**

Lee called on citizens who complain about the standard of living to make a difference and volunteer themselves.

He said residents should hold off on calling the police chief or mayor until they have looked in the mirror to see if "they can be proactive" to solve issues.

A KCK Guardian Angels branch could be established and could succeed if residents want to become involved, Lee said.

Lee also said the aim is to diversify the Guardian Angels.

"I don't care if you are a Democrat or a Republican," he said. "I don't care if you are black or white. I don't care if you are a heterosexual or homosexual. You are a Guardian Angel if you want to be."

If a branch is established, potential Guardian Angels would undergo months of training in self-defense tactics and communication issues using a 450-page manual.

Lee and Holland demonstrated some of the self-defense moves to the crowd this week. Lee said self defense should be used rather than trying something brave.

"It doesn't take a big strong person," Lee said. "Always think smarter, not harder."

Anne McDonald, who patrolled the last time the Guardian Angels were in KCK and also attended Tuesday's meeting, said residents need to give the Angels a chance.

McDonald also said the cities, which have no actual authority in the matter, should consider supporting the Guardian Angels.

"Kansas City, Kan., and Kansas City, Mo., are both on the brink of huge developments," McDonald said. "It's on the way back, but crime is still a concern."

Lee said although the group is hoping for a large membership, only five members, including a leader, are truly necessary to begin a full time branch.

"As long as you have a golden heart and want to give back to the community, that's great," Lee said.