



Bridgeton News

Angels graduating

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MILLVILLE -- The city's chapter of the Guardian Angels will graduate its first class of recruits during a ceremony Monday at the Thunderbolt Club.

David Benitez, chapter leader, said Thursday that between 10 and 13 people will become Guardian Angels after approximately three months of training.

The ceremony will take place at 7:30 p.m. at the 8th and E streets club.

"They are ready to do things a step further," he said, adding the soon-to-be Angels have been doing patrols with him for a while now. "We wanted everyone to graduate, then have them do their own groups so they can cover their own areas."

Benitez said the graduates have been trained in areas such as self defense, CPR, first aid and leadership. Guardian Angels do not carry weapons, but are well-known for making citizen's arrests.

"They are very impressive, very dedicated," he said of the chapter's first class.

The Millville chapter's youngest member is 17 years old, Benitez remarked. Its oldest member is 83.

Seventeen people make up the whole chapter, he added.

Guardian Angels founder Curtis Sliwa is expected to attend the graduation and act as the emcee.

Arnaldo "13" Salinas, as well as other Guardian Angels, will also be at the graduation, along with state and local officials.

Despite having graduated, Benitez said all of the local Angels will continue to improve upon their skills.

"The training never stops," he said, adding new techniques and methods are always presenting themselves.

Benitez added the city's chapter is also always open to taking new recruits.

"We would never turn anyone away," he said. "(The Guardian Angels) are about making a change for the neighborhood."

In addition to the group's Millville effort, Benitez said the Guardian Angels are also reaching out to the City of Bridgeton and Countryside Village, in Seabrook.

But their efforts will be scaled back in these two places, he said, adding they will just be focusing on apartment complexes in need of their services.

Initially, the Angels are only training recruits for a chapter at Bridgeton Villas, Benitez said, but the group has received inquiries about starting chapters at other housing complexes within city limits.

"We have four recruits from Bridgeton patrolling in Millville," Benitez said, adding local Angels officials have been meeting with Bridgeton officials, as well as the office managers of the various apartment complexes, to discuss the group and its purpose.

He commented that once the Bridgeton effort is established, he hopes to gain more recruits and allow the current four to move back into their communities.

Founded in New York City in response to muggings in the city's subway system, the Guardian Angels program is in its 29th year now. It includes more than 125 chapters in 14 countries.

For more information on the safety-patrol organization, visit www.guardianangels.org.

Information about the graduation or Guardian Angels can be obtained by calling Benitez at (609) 381-3144.

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