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Guardian Angels will establish headquarters

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WILKES-BARRE – The city's newly formed Guardian Angels chapter will establish headquarters at a former Hazle Avenue bar with a reputation for attracting trouble.



Wilkes-Barre's newly formed Guardian Angels chapter will establish headquarters at the former White House Cafe on Hazle Avenue.

Don Carey/The Times Leader

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Owners of the now-closed White House Caf◆, Lisa Ruzzi and her husband Louis, offered the space to the local citizen patrol group, said Jason Weston, the patrol leader of Wilkes-Barre's chapter.

"We are trying to make the streets safer and what better place to have our patrols than right there," said Weston, who was one of the first to enter the local ranks of the Angels in May. "I know the residents there don't want shootings on their streets."

Nine chapter members currently patrol several city neighborhoods after dark, he said.

The city's Angels will meet with the Ruzzis at the former White House Caf◆ to complete the lease

for \$1 at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, according to Scott Koppenhofer, coordinator of Wilkes-Barre's chapter.

City council member Tony Thomas lives in the area near the former bar. He said the local chapter's move to the tavern would help continue to bring down the criminal activity in his neighborhood.

"The Guardian Angels will be one more set of eyes out there," said Thomas, who demanded action at public meetings last June to shut down the nuisance bar. "They will be welcomed."

Since the closing of the White House Caf \diamond , Thomas said crime has gone "way down" in the past year in the Hazle Avenue area. He said city police are doing a good job by aggressively patrolling the streets in that area since the bar shut down.

"I've spoken to a number of neighbors and they're happy with what's going on in that area right now," Thomas said.

Weston said criminals continue to threaten the peace of Hazle Avenue residents. He said the chapter's new base will serve as a visual deterrent to this neighborhood's criminal element.

"We hope our presence there will be a message of support to those many city citizens who are working hard to improve the neighborhood," Weston said.


An active citizen patrol in the neighborhood, according to Lisa Ruzzi, will help address the ongoing crime concerns on Hazle Avenue. Ruzzi said she wants the community to be safe again, and she wanted to show the Guardian Angels her support by offering the space.

"We want the neighborhood back," Ruzzi said in a news release. "We are hoping the street patrol will help change the feeling in the neighborhood."

The city's Angels, known for their bright red berets and jackets, have been training in a donated space at a karate school and art studio on South Main Street, Weston said. As membership grows, he said the local chapter will need a more permanent and visible place.

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