

06/19/2008

## Guardian Angels get a home

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**WILKES-BARRE —** The Wilkes-Barre Area chapter of the Guardian Angels has a permanent meeting place at a symbolic location.

The crime prevention group will be headquartered at the former White House Cafe on Hazle Street. Owners Lisa and Lou Ruzzi offered the group an open-ended lease for a one-time fee of \$1. The Guardian Angels are free to stay there until the bar is sold, Lisa Ruzzi said.

The lease was signed Wednesday night at the bar.

“This is the right thing to do. We want our neighborhoods back,” said Lisa Ruzzi. “Hopefully, the Guardian Angels are able to fill the void that the police have been unable to fill.”

While the bar is not on the market, Lisa Ruzzi said she and her husband plan to sell at some point. The White House Cafe has been in Ruzzi’s family for 70 years, and Lisa and Lou Ruzzi closed it in October 2007 amid intense public pressure.

The bar has been at the center of controversy since a series of violent crimes occurred in and around the establishment. Two people were killed and several more were wounded.

The Guardian Angels are an unarmed volunteer crime prevention group that patrols high crime areas throughout the city, donning trademark red berets and jackets.

They act as a crime deterrent, but they do not take the law into their own hands, said member Eric Triani, a North End resident.

“It’s a beautiful place and it’s great to have a place where we can meet,” he said of the group’s new headquarters.

Rather than have the empty bar sit idle, Lisa Ruzzi contacted the Guardian Angels to see if they wanted to use the building.

The offer came just in time, said Wilkes-Barre Area chapter leader Jason Weston. The group was sharing space in the Stegmaier Building with a karate school and an art studio, so access was limited. Weston thought the group needed a more permanent home base and some office space from which to work.

Whether it uses the bar for a month, a year or 10 years, Weston is grateful for the opportunity.

He hopes having the space will allow the group to expand.

Lisa and Lou Ruzzi expect to hold onto the building for a while. They won’t sell until the status of the liquor license is resolved.

The Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board denied their renewal request on Nov. 7, 2007. The Ruzzis appealed, and Luzerne County Judge Hugh Mundy temporarily restored the license until their legal matters were resolved. They are awaiting a ruling from Luzerne County Judge Ann Lokuta.

Since the bar is not operating, the liquor license is in safekeeping. While they have no intention of reopening, Lisa and Lou Ruzzi want to hold onto the liquor license to increase the building’s value.

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