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## June 19

### Angels lease White House

**Citizen street patrol pays \$1 to occupy first floor of former W-B bar and trouble spot.**

JEN MARCKINI and BILL O ' BOYLE [jmarckini@timesleader.com](mailto:jmarckini@timesleader.com)

WILKES-BARRE – Lisa and Louis Ruzzi have no intention of re-opening the White House Caf☒, but they hope the Guardian Angels will be the answer to their prayers.



Scott Koppenhofer of the Guardian Angels acknowledges that a lease was signed with his group and the White House Caf☒ owner. Behind him is bar owner Lisa Ruzzi.

Don Carey/The times leader

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The Ruzzis leased the former bar to the city's Angels for \$1. The lease was signed Wednesday at the Hazle Avenue establishment.

"Why are we doing this? We've been thinking about what we can do to help the neighborhood," Lisa Ruzzi said. "Maybe the Guardian Angels will fill the void that the city police never did."

Ruzzi said she and her husband still own the liquor license, but it is in safekeeping with the state Liquor Control Board. She said she hopes to sell the license and the bar and hopes it reopens for the residents of the city.

The Angels will occupy the first floor. Ruzzi's father, Luzerne County Judge Chester A. Muroski, supports the idea.

After reading about the group in the local newspapers, Ruzzi said, she wanted to help.

"When I told him about our idea, he was all for it," she said. "Wilkes-Barre is being suffocated with crime."

Scott Koppenhofer, coordinator of the area Guardian Angels chapters, said the citizen street patrol has tried forming liaisons with the city's police department and Mayor Thomas Leighton.

Koppenhofer said their efforts have not been reciprocated.

Neighbors in the area, on Hutson and Lehigh streets, Tuesday said they were happy to hear of the Guardian Angels coming to their neighborhood, but none of them were willing to give their names for publication.

"I think it's a great idea," said an elderly man on Hutson Street. "They seem to be a good bunch. I've noticed a lot of kids hanging around together, like in gangs. We need somebody to watch out for the people."

Chapter member Eugene Albert, 51, who goes by the street name, "Moose," said he and his wife, Debby, live near the former White House on Farley Lane.

Albert said the move would help deter crime in his neighborhood -- from sidewalk drug deals on unlit street corners and porches to random acts of violence.

"It's going to be a big help for this area," Albert said. "It's a pretty bad area around here."

Before it closed in October, the White House had been loudly criticized for violence believed to stem from the pub.

In March 2004, two masked gunmen entered the cafe and shot three people. In January 2006, one person was shot and killed and another injured outside the bar. And in the most recent case, a man was shot and killed last June 17.

When they announced the bar was closing, the Ruzzis, who live in Bryn Mawr, lashed out at the city for failing to provide "equal and adequate police protection for its taxpaying citizens and businesses."

Lisa Ruzzi said insurance concerns have caused them to deny vehicular access to their property. A

chain has been placed across the parking lot entrance. The property abuts a vacant lot owned by the city, she said.

“It was becoming a roadway,” Ruzzi said. “We would like the city to establish a sub-station on the vacant lot. That would really put a police presence in the neighborhood.”

Ruzzi said violent crime in the neighborhood has continued since the White House closed.

“The crime continues and anyone who thinks otherwise is blind to the problem,” Ruzzi said.

In this part of town, where crime has been a growing concern in the past few years, the move could help improve the Hazle Street area, said Charlotte Raup, president of the city’s Crime Watch Coalition.


Ruzzi and Chapter Leader Jason Weston, of Nanticoke, invited Raup to Wednesday’s lease signing. She was unable to attend because she was heading back from Washington D.C. after receiving an award for good citizenship.

“There were a lot of problems in that area so that’ll be a good move for them,” Raup said in a phone interview. “They’re right in the heart of everything.”

*Jen Marckini*, a Times Leader staff writer, can be reached at 829-7210. *Bill O’Boyle*, a Times Leader staff writer, can be reached at 829-7218.

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