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Angels Watching Over Sacramento

Local 'Guardian Angels' Provide Deterrent to Crime

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About a month ago, members of the Sacramento chapter of the Guardian Angels, a volunteer organization committed to the safety and well-being of the community, were featured on local television stations as they patrolled Del Paso Boulevard in response to recent stabbings in the area. And for many people, this was their first look at this crime-fighting organization.



Clockwise from far left: Patrick Kent, Craig Fetter, Rocci Twitchell, "Mother Theresa" and Reno chapter member Ed Parks, aka "Shish-kabob," were among the Guardian Angels members patrolling the streets of Old Sacramento during the recent Sacramento Jazz Jubilee. (Sacramento Union Photo/Lance Armstrong)

With its mission to deter violence and crime through unarmed safety patrols, education and community service, the red beret-wearing group of nine volunteers is gradually working to become a household name in Sacramento.

As a whole, the organization is not exactly new or extremely small, considering it was founded in New York on Feb. 13, 1979. And since this time, the 501(c) (3) non-profit group has expanded throughout the globe, first appearing in Sacramento in the early 80s.

Although the Sacramento chapter disbanded a couple times since this time, its current group is very dedicated to maintaining the organization in the capital city.

And part of its presence in the community involves educating local residents about the Guardian Angels' existence and purpose in the Sacramento area.

The organization was founded by Curtis Sliwa, a McDonald's restaurant manager, who formed a garbage clean-up group called "The Rock Brigade." The group consisted of Sliwa and employees of the McDonald's where Sliwa managed.

As the Rock Brigade expanded its purpose to combat crime and violence, the group evolved into "The Magnificent 13" and later, the Guardian Angels, as membership increased past its original 13 members.

Earning Their Wings

The current Sacramento chapter of the Guardian Angels is committed to the same goals held by Guardian Angels worldwide.

Operating as a safety patrol, Sacramento's Guardian Angels safeguard the streets and other public areas, helping to ensure that citizens can enjoy local neighborhoods without fearing for their safety.

Although the group does not carry weapons, its members are trained in self-defense and believe firmly in the concept of strength in numbers.

Because of the nature of their work, most of the members of this local safety patrol group prefer to reveal only their first names for this article. And on the streets, the group remains even more confidential, using nicknames instead of their real names.

The lineup of the Guardian Angels' Sacramento chapter is: Senior Chapter Leader Patrick Kent, who is known as "Sir Kent," Chapter Leader Rocci Twitchell, who is known as "Firetech," Craig Fetter, who uses the nickname "Spock," Juan Lopez, whose street name is "Sabata,"

Theresa, who is known as “Mother Theresa,” Aaron, who is called “Shortstop,” Matt, who is referred to as “Ryder,” Charles, whose street name is “Bladerunner,” and Hector, whose is simply known as “Camacho.”

Dedicated to bettering the community, these chapter members, who range in age from 20 to 55 years old, spend many hours committed to patrolling the streets of the Sacramento area.

But as a volunteer organization, the time that its members can devote to the group is very limited, considering that its members are involved with their jobs and other activities.

Nonetheless, it would be difficult to find a much more dedicated group than the local Guardian Angels.

Twitchell explained that such dedication exemplifies the great determination that Guardian Angels have for assisting the community.

Being a Guardian Angel, said Twitchell, is about “wanting to make a difference in the community and stepping out of your comfort zone and getting out and making people aware of their surroundings.”

“A lot of people sit at home and worry about how the world is changing and how the world is turning to the bad and all that,” Twitchell said. “But that is why I like being a part of the Guardian Angels. I feel like when you go out and do a patrol and show your Guardian Angels colors, you’re showing the community that you care and that you want to take responsibility.”

Fetter added that understanding and seeing firsthand what the Guardian Angels stand for was compelling enough to cause him to want to join the organization.

“I remember reading about [the Guardian Angels] in a news article in 1979 and I liked the idea of who they were,” Fetter said. “And then last year, I saw an online article about a number of Angels, who were riding the light rail [in Sacramento] during the holiday season. They were on the light rail as a visual deterrence toward crime. After seeing that, I went to the Guardian Angels’ Web site, where I contacted them. I soon met up with them and after the very first night I went out with them, I was hooked.”

Powers of the Citizen

Although the Guardian Angels are not the police or a Neighborhood Watch group, they definitely fall somewhere in between.

“The difference between us and Neighborhood Watch is that we will actually intervene,” Kent said. “Yes, we are the eyes and ears of the police department, but we will take it one step further. We’ll involve ourselves and we’ll attain a citizen’s arrest. We’ll use that power to detain the suspect if it warrants us to, but we’ll also protect the victim. And we’ll also protect any crime scene evidence.”

Twitchell said that he is proud to say that many people in the local police force like what the Guardian Angels do for the community.

“There are a lot of police officers who really like what we are doing and they encourage it,” Twitchell said. “But then there are a few out there who just don’t want us stepping out there putting ourselves in harm’s way. But when you really think about it, when there are about eight or nine guys out there in red berets walking the streets, I don’t think anyone really wants to get involved with us and start a confrontation.”

Twitchell added that the police have stressed that it is important for the Guardian Angels to “not take matters into [their] own hands.”

“Of course, we aren’t going to take matters into our own hands,” Twitchell said. “We all have jobs and we all have personal lives that we don’t want to be interrupted. But we have the right, just like every citizen, to make a citizen’s arrest when we see things are going down. But more importantly, we’re going to document things, we’re going to be there to identify the person and we’re going to make sure that person is held responsible for the bad things he’s done.”

In the event of the Del Paso Boulevard area serial stabbings, which involved four random stabbings during the course of about six weeks, the Guardian Angels walked Del Paso Boulevard to create deterrence to the continuance of this crime.

Twitchell said that although some people criticized the Guardian Angels’ efforts to patrol Del Paso Boulevard, the organization continues to be supportive of assisting Del Paso Boulevard and other areas in times of need.

“I get a lot of people saying, ‘That’s stupid to go out there and walk Del Paso Boulevard,’” Twitchell said. “We’re not being stupid, we’re being brave. Bravery and stupidity are two different things and being brave is being out there showing that you don’t tolerate crimes and other things going on. I want to make a difference and if I have to go out there and be the eyes and ears of the police and put my foot in the middle of something that’s going down, I’m going to do it.”

Kent said that he is pleased to report that it appears that the Del Paso Boulevard area stabbings have ceased for the present time.

“We haven’t received any updates on whether or not this person has been captured, but we haven’t heard that there are any new incidents either, so obviously that’s definitely a positive step in the right direction,” Kent said. “We can only hope that the police have detained somebody and are keeping it quiet to protect any legal matters on the situation.”

In the meantime, Sacramento's Guardian Angels will continue their efforts to prevent and deter violence and crime, as well as search for new members.

As the Guardian Angels' Sacramento chapter continues its efforts to make a difference in the community, it invites the public to learn additional information about this organization through the Web site <http://www.guardianangels.org>.

For more information about the local chapter of the Guardian Angels, call (916) 346-2151 or write to the email address sacramento@guardianangels.org.