

Angels set to graduate class here Volunteers to patrol Westwood

*By Kevin Eigelbach
Post staff reporter*

Kizzy Lee watches her Guardian Angels in training like a mom with three kids in tow. She tells them when to walk side-by-side and when to form a single line to accommodate a passerby. When they reach an intersection of special concern, she commands them to "post up." The four form a square, backs to each other, hands crossed and resting on their stomachs. Lee, 26, is helping to train 14 local volunteers as Guardian Angels. Nine of them will graduate Wednesday, in a ceremony with Guardian Angels founder Curtis Sliwa.

Lee moved here with her husband, Frank Lee, the Angels' East Coast director, from New York City because they wanted a safer environment for their children.

Now, she said, she thinks of the Angels in training as her extended family. She teaches them how to patrol, and they teach her about Westwood.

The Angels came at the invitation of Westwood Concern, a neighborhood civic organization. It's too soon to know if their presence has made the streets safer, Westwood Concern co-founder Mary Kuhl said. Consistency will be a key.

"When they get on a block, the bad guys, the knuckleheads, pretty much amscray the heck out of there," she said.

"We've got to train the bad guys that these guys aren't going anywhere and we really do mean business."

When the Angels arrived in June, not everyone welcomed them. Some still don't see the need. "It says to people in other communities that things are so bad in Westwood that we need the Guardian Angels here," said Mark Minges, 49, a Westwood native and owner of the Neidhard-Minges Funeral Home on Harrison Avenue.

That sort of red flag might prevent someone from moving into the neighborhood or opening a business, Minges said. He sees no need for the patrols in the neighborhood's two business districts, at Harrison and Montana avenues and Glenmore and Montana avenues.

"It's still safe to walk through the district," he said. "It's still a pleasant, great neighborhood." Westwood's a big place. The city's largest neighborhood has 36,000 residents, more than one-tenth of Cincinnati's population.

So far, the Angels have concentrated around the apartment buildings near Harrison and McHenry avenues where they keep their headquarters.

Because some of the new recruits live in Price Hill, they have split their patrols between Westwood and Lower Price Hill, at Warsaw and Glenway avenues.

One of Lee's charges, 57-year-old Price Hill resident James Seymour, plans to serve as chapter leader for the Westwood/Price Hill/Western Hills neighborhoods. He's seen lots of changes in his neighborhood over the years, none of them good, and wants to help get the drugs out.

The Angels also want to expand into the city's most troubled neighborhood, Over-the-Rhine. Frank Lee plans to discuss those plans with Sliwa when he arrives next week.

Lee also plans to schedule a meeting with Cincinnati Police Chief Tom Streicher, because the Angels want a good working relationship with the police. They see themselves as extra eyes and ears for police, he said.

"We know a police officer can't be at five different places at one time," Lee said. Police spokesman Lt. Kurt Byrd said in June police had some reservations about the Angels. He backed away from that statement last week, but said he had heard little about the Angels one way or the other since their arrival.

"Certainly, they have a right to be doing what they're doing," Byrd said.

"I'm not aware of any negatives as relates to them, nor have I heard anything outstanding." One of the new recruits, Sissie Ann, who would not give her last name, said she's seen a difference in the faces of the people she sees while patrolling.

"I've seen more smiling faces," the 45-year-old grandmother said. "When I first started to patrol, they would growl at me. They gave me the hardest looks."

Her son and fellow trainee, Timothy Pelzel, said he has seen people disperse from street corners when he and his fellow trainees post up. That makes him feel good, he said.

Kuhl, from Westwood Concern, thinks the community has embraced the Angels. Residents have brought them food, cooked meals for them, bought them bicycles and just stopped to check on them, she said. She has heard from many other communities, as far away as Toledo, where people want to start an Angels chapter.

"The key factor is to get folks to realize that mom and dad or somebody on a big white horse is not going to come in and save their neighborhood," she said.

"They have to do it on their own."

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