

August 3, 2009

## What's behind the Guardian Angels

BY JAMES EZZO JR.

On July 23 my chapter of The Alliance of Guardian Angels was invited to speak in Roxbury Township.

We were contacted by Dennis Gallagher who has had a private practice in Roxbury for many years. He was concerned about recent criminal activity that occurred in Roxbury and decided he was going to get involved.

Our meeting was attended by about 40 Roxbury residents and became a lively discussion about what is happening in Roxbury and what, if anything, its citizens could do to help. My part as chapter leader was to tell the group of my experience with the Guardian Angels in Sussex Borough and to answer any questions the group might have about who we are, what we do and how we do it.

We got, as always, mixed feelings about whether or not we could help, and whether we should. After all, Roxbury has a 45-man police department. Our contention was, is and will always be that yes, we can and do help a community combat its criminal activity.

Please understand Guardian Angels don't come into town selling our product. We simply explain the process of how a group of concerned citizens can start a chapter. The desire to do so must come from the ground up within the community. It's this type of volunteer attitude that helped build this nation, and the same volunteer attitude can help make any community's streets safer.

This is where the Guardian Angels come in. We are trained observers. We are disciplined street patrols. We are friends, first and foremost, to every citizen of our town, until they prove otherwise. We provide to elderly citizens a feeling of comfort when we're seen patrolling their street. We provide a positive role model for the children when they see a group of their neighborhood's adults taking time to walk the streets to make them safer. Most importantly, we send a message to the criminal element that we, as citizens, are organized to assist the police in whatever way we can. That's what we do.

Our attitude is that there can never be enough volunteers in any community to help. A few more coaches for the recreational sports teams, a few more troop leaders for boy and girl scout troops and an organized safety patrol for our streets. The bottom line is, volunteerism helps all in the community.

The Sussex Borough chapter of Guardian Angels has been very successful in achieving our goals in town. We don't have municipal police. We are under the jurisdiction of the New Jersey State Police, and they have a very large area of our part of northern New Jersey to serve.

We have been able to provide a presence to prevent people from surrounding towns, who know we don't have our own police force, from coming into town and doing just as they please. Our streets are much safer now than they were before my chapter of Guardian Angels arrived on the scene.

I would never take all the credit for Sussex Borough's renaissance and revitalization, which it has experienced in the last several years, but we definitely played a part, and of that I am proud. My members and I have been patrolling the streets for 4 1/2 years, and we are well-liked by both business owners and citizens alike. We sponsored National Night Out twice since our inception, sponsored and assisted with blood drives and have had a booth in the community tent at New Jersey State Fair at the Sussex County Fairgrounds.

We also trained new chapters in Easton, Bangor and Pottstown, Pa. We were there for the volunteers in those communities and we will be there for Roxbury Township or anywhere we are asked to go.

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