

Citizens group marches in New Bedford

New Bedford Guardian Angels make their mark

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- Reported by: Alysha Palumbo

NEW BEDFORD, Mass (WPRI) - A new citizens group tried to garner support as they marched at the parade of the Feast of the Blessed Sacrament on Sunday in New Bedford.

The parade is the famed Budweiser Clydesdale horses, plenty of bands and dancers, and this year, a new addition - the Guardian Angels, a military-style citizens group.

Curtis Sliwa, Guardian Angels founder lead the group's march Sunday morning.

"It's sort of like we're rock stars, but now we have to deliver, so the hard work is to be done, the heavy lifting - organizing, getting people from New Bedford and Fall River involved and getting to become guardian angels," Sliwa said.

The angels have already started their patrols of the city and the response is overwhelmingly positive.

New Bedford resident Theresa Demelo said the group has already made an impact.

"Somehow, for some reason they seem to help unite the community to combat crime and we need that so much in this city because the crime has gotten out of hand," Demelo said.

While many in the New Bedford community are glad to see the Guardian Angels walking the street, the angels and New Bedford mayor Scott Lang don't exactly see eye to eye.

"We preach non-violence and we preach non-intervention, so that's a little bit different than the Guardian Angels philosophy," Lang said.

Sliwa feels the mayor should take a closer look.

"Maybe the mayor and the elected officials should be walking with us to see all the positive response that we're getting as opposed to the negative response that they've initially given our effort." Sliwa said.

To help get that grassroots effort off the ground, angels throughout the region are here to help train and staff the New Bedford Angels.

Michael Weydt, a Brockton Guardian Angel, will participate in the effort.

"It's about maintaining a presence on the street to help deter crime that's actually happening right on our streets," Weydt said.

The new Guardian Angels will be defense, CPR, and how to patrol the streets. They hope to deter violence, drug trafficking and prostitution.

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