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Bolton grad's TV series to premiere on Monday

*By Abbey Brown
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Ordinary people doing extraordinary things -- that's how Shaun Sanghani described "Guardian Angels," the show he created and co-produced that premieres Monday night on the Biography Channel.

Sanghani, who graduated from Bolton High School in 1998, spends about half of his time here and the other half in Los Angeles. Although he's been working in the television and film industry for some time now, Sanghani described the show as his "big break."

"Guardian Angels" is a half-hour reality series documenting the work of the Guardian Angels, a group of volunteers who work with police to help communities take back their streets.

Monday's episode was filmed in December in a housing project in Atlantic City.

"Right now, it is very much a trial by fire situation," Sanghani said.

They've shot and filmed the first episode, which was purchased by A&E. The show will air at 9 p.m. on the cable network's sister network Biography -- channel 150 on Suddenlink cable. The network will gauge the public's reaction to the show and then decide if they want to order more episodes.

"If you like it, write them and let them know," he said. "If you didn't like it, let me know why."

In the episode, a young girl who lives in Stanley Village housing project calls on the Guardian Angels, saying she's so afraid in her own home that she often hides in the closet. The organization's founder, Curtis Sliwa, deploys an elite team of the organization down to Atlantic City to meet with the girl and others in the community.

"They teach the community how to stand up for themselves," he said of the Guardian Angels. "These guys are volunteers, ordinary guys like you and me doing this. They really are everyday super heroes."

The group of established Guardian Angels goes to these communities to recruit other members and teach them to take their community back.

Sliwa, reached by phone Thursday, said he hopes the show is a recipe for a community to empower themselves to take back their streets, combat crime and create a quality of life they deserve into their neighborhoods.

He started the organization in the late 1970s in New York City as people were paralyzed with fear as crime ravished the streets. He was a night manager at a fast-food restaurant and was tired of seeing the crime day after day.

"I decided enough was enough," Sliwa said. "It was time to get out and start patrolling and taking

back our streets."

For the first 13 years the group grew, but things were extraordinarily difficult and dangerous for the Guardian Angels. Citizens, police and city leaders saw the group more as a gang than a group of local residents fighting for the safety of themselves, their families and the rest of the community. He was arrested 76 times as an act of harassment in those first 13 years.

All of that changed in 1993 when Rudy Giuliani was elected as mayor and established an official working relationship between the group and the city. Communities across the nation that had developed their own Guardian Angels chapters started getting the same treatment from their city's leaders.

Today, there are chapters of Guardian Angels in 14 countries and 140 cities. Now, 85 percent of those cities have a positive working relationship with the police department and city officials in their communities.

"It's not a show about just crisis intervention," Sliwa said. "It is a real life hands-on look at what we do."

Sanghani graduated from Tulane University with a psychology degree and also received a masters in business administration from there. He then went to the University of Southern California, where he received a masters in film. He began as a screenwriter but said the businessman in him made him realize it was too risky to spend six months working on a screenplay, unsure if it would get bought or not.

"This show has opened up so many doors for me," Sanghani said. "It has been a two-year process, but this last year everything has been a lot easier. I hope this is the first step. It is a great launching point for me."

Additional Facts

Know To Go

What: "Guardian Angels," created and co-produced by Bolton High School graduate Shaun Sanghani

When: Monday, 9 p.m.

Where: Biography, or Bio, Channel (channel 150 on Suddenlink, channel 266 on DirecTV and channel 119 on Dish Network)
