

Post-Bulletin

Guardian Angels ready to start patrols in Rochester

Fri, Aug 28, 2009 PB Online

By [Matt Russell](#)

Post-Bulletin, Rochester MN

As he's made a habit of doing whenever a new Guardian Angels chapter forms, organization founder Curtis Sliwa presides at the ceremony inducting the new trainees.

He'll be in Rochester on Sunday to oversee a ceremony in which the city's first six trainees graduate.

"I think it's important because it's the official seal of approval in terms of the certification process," said Sliwa, who formed the Guardian Angel's first volunteer crime patrol group 30 years ago in New York City. "It's ratifying everything that's been done by the local people who have completed the training process."

Sunday's ceremony means the Rochester Guardian Angels chapter is no longer classified as "under development," said chapter leader Mike LaPlante.

Patrols to begin

The change in designation to established chapter means Rochester Guardian Angels can conduct its own patrols and start training its own members, LaPlante said.

Exactly where the group will patrol, and how often, isn't clear -- LaPlante won't discuss it.

"We don't want our movements to be predictable," he said. "We don't want the criminal element to know we're coming or watching the area. We'll just pop in there, and that's part of being a visual deterrent."

Police reports and the group's own observations will play a role in determining where patrols occur, LaPlante said.

The Rochester Guardian Angels have been trained since March by the Guardian Angels' Minneapolis chapter, which will continue to conduct training in Rochester from time to time and invited Rochester members to join patrols in Minneapolis to gain experience.

"We still need to work on these things now because we're so new," LaPlante said.

More training

In June, there were 17 people in Guardian Angels training. Six graduate Sunday, some complete their training later and some have left the chapter, LaPlante said. A group of four or five will start training in September.

It isn't unusual for the Guardian Angels to start small in a city the size of Rochester, Sliwa said. However, a small number of Guardian Angels can make a bigger impact in a community like Rochester, he said.

Rochester Police Chief Roger Peterson said it's a positive thing when citizens get involved in public safety. The ultimate success of the Guardian Angels will depend on the people involved, what they do, and whether the group has lasting power in the community, he added.

"I think in terms of what our level of interaction will be, it really will be determined as we go," Peterson said. "If that's a good relationship, that will be good for everybody."

