

# Post-Bulletin

## Guardian Angels grows as violence invades smaller cities

Fri, Aug 28, 2009 PB Online

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By [Matt Russell](#)

Post-Bulletin, Rochester MN

Having seen the Guardian Angels grow to include more than 125 chapters around the world, founder Curtis Sliwa isn't surprised to see a volunteer crime patrol group forming in Rochester.

Violence like the drive-by shootings Rochester has seen during the past year is becoming more common in cities with populations of 100,000 or less in the U.S., leading to new Guardian Angels chapters being formed, he said.

"That's where most of our growth has been in the United States in the last 10 years," he said.

Sliwa will be in Rochester on Sunday to speak to the first Guardian Angels graduates here, marking the chapter's official start.

Here's what he had to say this week about the Guardian Angels and how the group can make a positive difference in Rochester.

What are some of the biggest factors in whether the Guardian Angels will be successful here?

I think the key is you have to have good, consistent leadership that leads by example, and you must have partnerships in the community. You cannot go it alone. The days of going independently and autonomously are over. I did that for 13 years when we were treated like pariahs, when no officials, police department or elected officials of any type, anywhere, would work with us or communicate with us. That all changed in 1993 when Rudy Giuliani was elected mayor of New York City and he embraced us and set a different tone of how to work with us.

I like the fact that in Rochester you have the president of the (Eastside) Pioneer Neighborhood Association (Mike LaPlante) be the one to do the outreach. Obviously, he's already a community organizer. ... Anytime you can partner up with existing community organizations, you're that much stronger. And naturally, you have to have a presence. You have to be consistently out there to make a difference.

How do you think the chapter here can best work with police to have a good relationship and be productive?

Complete partnership. To have a working relationship in which we're very similar to a block watch or crime watch or an auxiliary police department where we are subordinate to the police and yet they know all about us. So there's no misunderstanding of who we are and what we do. We're not the Hell's Angels. We're not vigilantes. We do things differently than other community groups because we will make a citizen's arrest. That's a right that any citizen has. You just have to train and know when to do it and how to do it appropriately. We will physically intervene and break up fights and disputes and send people on their way without necessarily having to call the police if no crime has been committed.

We'll do gang intervention. That means we'll ride up on gangs and start immediately trying to talk to those on the periphery out of that lifestyle. Because not everyone hanging with a gang is a hard-core gang-banger. A lot of them are wannabes. They're posers, as we call them. You try to pick them off and sometimes try to get them to join you as an alternative, because they're going to join something because so many of them come from a dysfunctional background.

So there are a lot of things that we will do that other groups either cannot do or choose not to do. And I think once the police analyze how we train our people and how we conduct ourselves in the streets, they'll be more comfortable with us.

What kind of attrition or dropout rate do you typically see with Guardian Angels recruits?

That will all be determined by their own mettle, mental and physical mettle. I will certainly harp on that at the graduation in my remarks. Obviously we've operated in many areas both in Canada and the United States where the weather is very

inclement, either inclement in terms of extreme cold and snow and ice or extreme heat like Phoenix, Arizona. But as I'm going to explain, crime doesn't stop, criminal activity continues, and you've got to keep pace. You've got to work that much harder because we're the new jacks. We're the new flavor in town, and we've got a lot of ground to cover in order to establish that credibility. But most times, Guardian Angels are up to the challenge.

In the meantime, even though only six are graduating, they have others in training who will slowly graduate through that period of time, and other new people will be coming on who will begin the process of becoming Guardian Angels.

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