

Post-Bulletin

Guardian Angels hit the streets of Rochester

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Criminals in Rochester now have something other than police squad cars to watch out for.

Rochester Mayor Ardele Brede said there will be "another set of eyes out there" -- the Rochester Guardian Angels.

The new chapter of volunteer crime patrollers began at Gilligan's Cove on Sunday when seven people graduated in front of an audience of about 20 people. They had passed their training in CPR, first aid, handcuffs and self-defense.

One audience member, Carol Breen of Rochester, said she likes the idea of the Guardian Angels.

"I just think it's time that somebody does something," said Breen.

Mike LaPlante, Rochester Eastside Pioneer Neighborhood Association president, led the local chapter's formation and is now its leader.

"This all started from some of the crime that was taking place in Rochester," LaPlante said.

What do Guardian Angels do?

Patrol areas identified as needing assistance or where neighborhoods have requested it. They call police if a crime is committed. Make "citizens' arrests" and detain the arrested individual until police arrive.

History

Guardian Angels national CEO Curtis Sliwa attended the graduation to show support for the new group.

He told the audience that Guardian Angels face risk (six have been killed while volunteering since the group started during the 1970s in New York City).

But, Sliwa said, modern technology like cell phones has helped prevent serious injuries during the past several years.

Sliwa hopes the Rochester group will grow. Guardian Angels are not vigilantes, and they do not go out into the street and strong-arm people, he said.

"That's not what we do," Sliwa said. But, he said, "I can understand why people think that."

Instead, the goal is to create "visual deterrents" and role models for young people (youths must be age 16 before they can join) while intervening to prevent crime.

Mayor Brede worried aloud that the group is not diverse. But Sliwa said membership is open to anyone willing to go through training, and members will reach out to all communities, including Hispanic, black, Somali and Hmong cultures.

Brede's presence Sunday, Sliwa said, is "a tremendous sign to the residents that we're being embraced."

Sliwa has credited New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani's support as helping push the Guardian Angels' acceptance.

What's next?

More candidates start training in September.

Mark Fischer, one of those who graduated Sunday, said his son Andrew does not go on patrols, but gets to go along when Fischer attends community events as a Guardian Angels. Andrew hopes to join the group.

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