



Salt Lake Community College

Guardian Angels making Salt Lake a safer place

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The Guardian Angels started 30 years ago in New York, by Curtis Silwa, a McDonald's night manager in a crime-ridden area of the Bronx. Disturbed by the rampant crime in his area, he "formed a voluntary, weapon-free patrol of 13 to take the subways, the streets and the neighborhood back from crime." The Guardian Angels have received numerous awards, recognition, catalyzed societal and educational improvement programs and "inspired young people to create twenty chapters around the world." Today, the Angels still carry no weapons, on foot, clad in iconic red berets.

The Angels watch over 2nd and 4th street, Main Street, State Street, areas by TRAX, homeless shelters and clubs. Generally, anywhere where "things can get out of hand" Angels can be found.

Recently, the Salt Lake City Chapter pushed drug-activity out of Liberty Park in downtown. Parents were reluctant to take children there, seeing as bathroom stalls were littered with used needles and drug pushers were on and off grounds, constantly.

Freddie Samora, Salt Lake City Chapter President, has an extensive background in martial arts, kick boxing and experience from his service in the military. Utilizing that knowledge and expertise, Samora and his fellowship never "walk into a situation unprepared."

There are, of course, prerequisites to meet before jumping into action.

Along with filling out an application from guardianangels.org and undergoing a background check, finding your passion, knowing what you do best, is essential to figuring out where you "fit in."

Contrary to common belief, the Angels are not strictly patrol units that accompany the police. They also work with families, make donations to shelters, have educational programs for children and ex-gang members and often, help people they meet while out in the community in limitless ways.

"There are so many people trying to do right by the world, they could help so much joining the Guardian Angels," Samora said.

For someone who is "good with people" answering the phone or advertizing the Angel's mission through public relations and education may be preferred. Even in patrolling units, while there is people who physically detain and hold down the criminals, there's also people who make the calls to the police and the people to build a human perimeter around the scene, so civilians are not hurt.

"Whatever you want to do, you make an agreement with us," Samora said. This is a promise that you'll be there, donating your time fairly, and contributing accordingly. As a volunteer group, participation is crucial.

After that, the Guardian Angel's training begins. There's martial art training one day and another day to accompany the Angels while on patrol, every week.

What makes the Angels so effective is there approach and strategy. Even if it's five against fifteen, the Angels are disadvantaged only in number. While patrolling, you have to expect the unexpected. Samora has dealt with people wielding knives, cars idling beside them with windows rolled down, as if prepared to drive-by, shoot or much worse. Unarmed, the Angels' greatest weapon is their shared trust and effectiveness as a team. No one is ever left behind; they always stay together.

"With the Guardian Angels, we understand the situation we're getting into. We have to know the approach, how to work as a unit, which is why graduation [from Guardian Angel training] is necessary," Samora said.

"When I feel they know the training, the Guardian Angel's manual, seen and been with us on some of the patrols, I'll know if they're ready or not."

Generally, training takes about three or four months. And, while many may not have a background in martial arts, the Angels will give you lessons, for free, until you're prepared. If there's a group at SLCC willing to learn, he just needs to confirm it with the school, find a hall or room to practice in, and Samora will personally begin training.

Once qualified, scheduling will be discussed. Samora doesn't demand full time contribution. He will "make time work for you."

"The more people I recruit, the more I can do," Samora admitted, however.

It helps to have a lot of people to work with, instead of just a few being overworked and investing several hours at a time. For example, at one event, Angels in shifts of four people had to watch over people's belongings in the park from 8 PM through midnight the following day.

Samora's goal is to have the Guardian Angels run like a business, have a head quarters so should someone call, there will always be someone help available, immediately.

Becoming a Guardian Angel obviously comes with hard work and dedication, but isn't impossible.

"You see how the world really is out there. When you walk down a block, you're gonna learn a lot more than driving down it," Samora said.

"We're not afraid to get in people's faces who are doing wrong...we help in any way we can," Samora said.

See GuardianAngels.org or contact Freddie Samora at 801-696-0989 or Fred.Samora@yahoo.com or SaltLakeCity@GuardianAngels.org.