

IN THE NEWS: WASHINGTON D.C.

Guardian Angels patrol Georgetown



The Associated Press

HELP US: John Ayala, director of the Washington chapter of the Guardian Angels, right, and Steven Aguirre appeal for more community help to patrol Georgetown, the toniest of Washington neighborhoods.

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WASHINGTON — Georgetown, with its trendy restaurants and quaint row houses, might seem an unlikely location for Guardian Angel patrols.

But the crime-fighters in trademark red berets are being welcomed after more than a half-dozen recent robberies and the deaths of three Starbucks Coffee shop workers found shot in the head July 7.

"We were surprised to get a call from here, but there are people who are upset and they are scared," said John Ayala, local coordinator for the Guardian Angels, which operate in 67 cities.

He said Georgetown's upscale image also can be a magnet for criminals.

"You're more apt to get someone who has some money in their pocket," said Ayala, a longtime member of the crime-fighting group, which has been active in the Washington area for eight years.

The 20-member Washington chapter already patrols the city's subway system and Adams Morgan, a multicultural neighborhood where young professional rub elbows with day laborers. ---

Six years ago, the Guardian Angels patrolled Georgetown daily for about two months after a string of muggings. The group walked the streets in the affluent neighborhood again, briefly, last winter.

Ayala said the new patrols will succeed only if the group can attract new members and persuade local businesses to provide a headquarters for the group and free meals, he said.

White recruiting signs already were flapping from traffic lights at a busy intersection where the group held a news conference Friday.

"If you are 16 years or older, you can become a crime-fighting legend," the signs read. "Can you patrol 8 hrs a week to be part of the solution?"

Actually, fewer people are being killed in Washington, a city once nicknamed the nation's murder capital. At this time last year, there were 221 murders on record, compared with 164 homicides so far this year.

Still, Sam Captain, part owner of a 24-hour Amoco service station next door to a Boston Market that was robbed recently, welcomed the Guardian Angels to the area.