

# Lifestyle

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## Guardian Angels' godsend on Southeast streets

By Andy Guess

A line of Army-uniformed kids marches into the house on the corner of 15th and K streets. It looks just like any other block in Southeast D.C., but this one is different. It is the home of the Guardian Angels. And thanks to their efforts, it is also one of the safest neighborhoods in Southeast.

With one Angel per street corner, churchgoers return home this Saturday night knowing they don't have to worry about being mugged.

It's time for a break before the Angels go out again. It is only the start of the night, but they have already been on patrol for a little while. Nothing unusual has happened, like the time when they got into a shouting match with some delinquents, or the time they hunted a purse-snatcher for an hour.

They're just ordinary people who decide to give a little back to the community at night and on weekends.

The Guardian Angels are a volunteer police force comprised mostly of teenagers who patrol the streets and stop crime before it starts.

Sixty-seven chapters of this international non-profit organization exist in U.S., Canadian and Mexican cities, on college campuses and even on the Internet. The D.C. chapter won the 1998 Chapter of the Year award and has a reputation for excellence.

According to one member whose code name is Ramrod, some chapters are known for harassing and beating people unnecessarily. But not this chapter.

"We're a good group of people, we're all nice and friendly, we do a real good job and we look professional," said John "Bamako" Atwood, a sophomore at Washington Waldorf School and an Angel for one and a half months.

Professional indeed. All

members wear matching shirts, red berets which double as signaling aids, black cargo pants and combat boots and undergo three months of training before "graduating" to the status of regular members. Some even have radios. But one thing they'll never carry is a weapon.

According to member "Lint," the bikes on which the Angels sometimes patrol are their only weapons. If the group confronts someone carrying a knife, the bikes become their line of defense.

According to "Brooklyn," group members are also required to take Tai-Kwon-Do street combat two to three times a week.

The rules concerning weapons (and drugs, for that matter) are so strict that anyone entering the D.C. Angels' house is searched.

The Guardian Angels were founded Feb. 13, 1979, by restaurant manager Curtis "Rock" Sliwa, who, along with 12 of his fellow employees at a New York City McDonald's, began patrolling a subway train in the Bronx known as "the mugger's express," according to "Jeff Man," a Guardian Angels alumnus and assistant to the regional leader. Sliwa and his group prompted the city to create a transit police force that would patrol the trains at night. However, the train patrol group wasn't Sliwa's first attempt at helping the city.

"He took kids that wouldn't clean their own rooms and had them cleaning store fronts and streets," Jeff Man said.

After a while, the gangs started to die out around the area Sliwa patrolled, and the

original patrol group, the Magnificent 13, expanded to the Guardian Angels. The D.C. chapter was created in 1989 when local residents were frustrated with the ongoing crime and drug dealing in the area. Locals donated a house to the Angels and also provide the group with food.

This Saturday it is fish and rice. On the way to pick it up, the members go the way they always do, double file, no talk-

consin Avenue was blocked because of traffic.

But it's not always the police that they're helping.

The Guardian Angels spent a day in the Fort Totten area helping the FBI look for a rape suspect.

"We went around with flashlights, and the FBI people gave us a picture of him," Brooklyn said, gesturing to the "WANTED" ad on the wall. They even got a free

one doing something that obviously illegal, they can make a citizen's arrest, which does not involve handcuff. Eligible crimes for citizen arrests include felonies and misdemeanors involving \$40 or more and any more severe crimes. After the Angels make the arrest, the police are called.

Sometimes the Angels are confronted with gangs of other groups of men who jeer and mock them. Such intimidation can sometimes lead to rock-throwing, according to Ramrod.

Later at night, the Angels usually go out on "train patrol," meaning the Metro Blue Line. They have it down to a science. One to two members per car, with one person going from car to car, switching at each station. While the train is in motion they look for suspicious activity and pass out brochures to passengers. At each stop the Angels in each car kneel down by the door to make sure everything is all right with the other members. A member can only use the doors

connecting the cars in an emergency.

The Guardian Angels also patrol special events, such as the Taste of D.C. festival (where Atwood met the Guardian Angels), the AIDS Walk and New Year's Eve, when all chapters go to New York City's Times Square.

The Angels accept all members, male or female, who are 16, have jobs or are in school and don't have a major criminal record.

"You'll get your community service hours in no time," Atwood remarks.

Community service should

See ANGELS, C3



The Angels take a break from their nightly patrol.

ing, looking straight ahead. Just a routine pick-up until two police officers are spotted.

These are not just any police officers. D.C.'s Chief of Police Charles H. Ramsey and his second-in-command shake hands with all of the members.

According to Ramrod, the Guardian Angels' excellent relationship with the D.C. Capitol and transit police was especially evident this past Halloween.

"We helped the cops with roadblocks," Atwood said. "It was a lot of fun, and we got a lot of compliments." Every street off M Street and Wis-

consin Avenue was blocked

because of traffic. The Angels usually start out with street patrols, looking for drug deals, getting rid of drunks and stopping fights. It's not often that they come across crime in progress, because most people in the area know the Angels are there. Their very presence usually stops crimes or deals from happening.

"Since we've been here, the cops are coming quicker," Brooklyn said. "If something happens, it's usually a mistake."

"We gotta do what we gotta do, and that's it," "Big Hawaii" added.

If the members see some-