

ST. CROIX SOURCE

Guardian Angels Offer Youth Violence Alternatives

by Source staff



John Ayala (left), Arnaldo Salinas, Guardian Angels.

Oct. 26, 2004 - The Tuesday meeting of the St. Croix Educational Complex Parent Teacher Student Association features a special guest speaker, Arnaldo Salinas, senior director and founding member of the New York City-based Guardian Angels.

Curtis Sliwa founded the Guardian Angels 24 years ago in the south Bronx, recruiting volunteers for beautification and cleanup efforts in his neighborhood and eventually expanding to patrol the subways. Identified by their signature red berets, the Guardian Angels has grown from a group of 13 friends to a worldwide organization of over 14,000 members.

Salinas will be sharing his organization's methods of school safety facilitation and creation of alternatives for students to violent confrontations. The community is invited to attend.

Carolyn Keys of the Alternative to Violence Project will also speak to the parent's teachers and students. The meeting begins at 5:30 p.m. in the school's auditorium. Salinas and John Ayala, Guardian Angels Mid-Atlantic regional director, stationed in Washington, D.C., arrived at the Henry E. Rohlsen airport on St. Croix at around 1:30 p.m. Tuesday. Ayala said he has been studying the "criminal patterns of St. Croix" for several months. Salinas said St. Croix does not have 10 percent of the problems that many large cities have, but it is time to nip those problems in the bud. Salinas said if the community "embraces the concept," training for local guardian angels can begin. "Our methodology attracts volunteers to us," said Salinas. "This is at no cost to the community."

Salinas and Ayala will be canvassing the island, meeting with students at various schools, government officials and representatives of the private sector.

The local Anti Crime Task Force invited the pair to St. Croix. "We have been invited because of our successful track record," Salinas said. (For more information about the Guardian Angels go to www.guardianangels.org).

Last week, the task force hosted representatives of a company that hopes to establish a mounted patrol to police St. Croix beaches and towns. (See "Horses Could Help in Island's Fight Against Crime").

On Friday, the Guardian Angels will visit the students and staff at the Eulalie R. Rivera Professional Development School in Grove Place. They will orient the students and staff on the organization's early education violence prevention program.

On Sunday, the Guardian Angels will join with Parents Against Violence in a memorial march in remembrance of all Virgin Islands youth who have lost their life to violence. The march will begin at 4 p.m. at the intersection of King and Queen Cross Street and proceed down King Street to the public beach across from the Paul E. Joseph ballpark. According to May Adams Cornwall, president of the Education Complex Parent-Teacher Association and organizer of the event, anyone participating in the march is asked to wear a white T-shirt.

"We are going to be remembering over 100 youths who lost their lives in violent situations," she said. "A single white carnation will be thrown into the sea as a visual impact of the lives lost." Cornwall said she hopes this solemn ceremony will also help with the healing of the community.