

Angels aim to ramp up presence in New Haven's Edgewood neighborhood

Published: Thursday, July 22, 2010

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NEW HAVEN — The Guardian Angels want to put more feet on the street to curb what they say is a persistent crime problem in the Edgewood neighborhood.

Eliezer Greer, founder of the Edgewood Park Defense Patrol, and Rocky Pratt, the Angels chapter head in New Haven, gathered with some other Angels at the intersection of Ellsworth Avenue and Maple Street Wednesday evening to explain their plans.

“It’s summer, so more outdoor crimes are being committed, including drug activities, car break-ins and prostitution,” said Pratt. “We are going to intensify the recruiting effort in New Haven and work with the community to get things quieter.”

Greer said the Police Department may not have time to immediately analyze and address a crime like a car break-in, so that is where the Guardian Angels step in.

“Things like break-ins, graffiti and loitering all happen when there isn’t a presence around,” said Greer. “We want to prevent crime before things start to become unpleasant and there are things like gunpoint robberies.”

The Guardian Angels have 10 members in the New Haven area, but can get help from nearby chapters. On any given night, they have six to 12 people patrolling the 17-block Edgewood area.

“There is nothing like a woman coming up to you late at night after working the second shift and saying, ‘Thank you, I feel so much safer that you are around,’ and we hear that a lot,” said Pratt. “Ten times over, the thank-yous make it worth it.”

Part of the Angels’ patrol includes talking to youths they see hanging out on the streets and making their presence known. They will also talk to children who are giving their parents a hard time at home, and speak to kids at school assemblies.

“We tell them how to make the right choices, and that there are things to focus on in life other than having to get home before dark,” said Pratt.

The local Guardian Angels chapter was founded in 2007 and has recently gotten calls from city leaders asking to re-invigorate the group’s presence, said Greer. They recently recruited four

people, and they are looking to maintain a minimum level of participation and enlist a few new members each month.

“As much as some people want you to be out there, we got people out here that are actual bullies,” said Taxi, a Guardian Angels member and second-in-command, who goes by just his nickname. “You could not imagine that individuals in these households affect the whole community. They say one bad apple spoils the bushel. Well, we have a lot of bad apples in this neighborhood.”

Pratt wants to encourage more young people to join the program as a way of giving their lives direction. He joined at 21 after displaying some delinquent behavior and a friend got him involved with the Angels. His son, Tim Pratt, is now looking to join the group as well.

“There are always naysayers, but crime is still here and the Guardian Angels are still here,” said Greer.

A chapter opened in Hartford about a year ago, and more chapters are popping up throughout the state. Norwalk is just kicking off its initiative with two members and will continue recruiting.

The New Haven chapter is trying to spread the word on the street, and they will add another night patrol between 11 p.m. and 4 a.m. to their schedule.

“We are here to help the community get rid of bad people,” said Taxi. “One person can put fear into an entire neighborhood and make it so people don’t even want to come out of their households.”

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