



Angels plan to make our communities safer

12 January 2006

A civilian crime-fighting force plans to take lawlessness off the streets of West Auckland.

Andy Cawston said there was a need for the Guardian Angels - a New York-based community patrol - in Henderson, his home since emigrating from Canada with his family in 1994.

Senior members of the organisation arrive in New Zealand on Friday to help Mr Cawston - a software salesman - recruit volunteers for the role of making their community safer.

"I've been planning this for about a year with the Guardian Angels in New York, Denver, Reno and Portland - we're just at the point where we are beginning to train our volunteers."

He said Henderson was "reasonably safe" and he would like to keep it that way.

"New Zealand is a beautiful country, and I would like the Guardian Angels to help keep it safe as well."

He said there was an emerging crime problem and now was the time to get on top of it before it gets out of hand.

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"This is a way I can give something back to a country that has taken us in and given us a home and made us welcome."

The volunteers - dressed in a red beret and a white t-shirt with red Guardian Angel crests - would take turns patrolling various neighbourhoods in groups of six.

Mr Cawston said their main role would be to prevent crime.

"We are not out to enforce the law, we're not out to punish people.

"Violent crime is our particular focus - we are not out to punish people for spitting on the sidewalk."

He said Guardian Angels stayed away from drug users and gangs, but their role in Waitakere city would be determined by the community.

"One of the strong messages that I've had was that we would be quite useful in patrolling parking lots - there's a lot of vehicle break-ins, thugs hanging around intimidating people."

Many people would prefer not to place themselves at the mercy of suspicious characters in poorly light car parks, but Mr Cawston said the Guardian Angels manage that risk.

"We don't go looking for trouble - but we do train in martial arts, CPR, and first aid."

Opposition to the angels' presence, he said, was minimal.

He said the Waitakere City Council had been "excellent", and the police were showing support, slowly.

Under the Crimes Act Guardian Angels would have the right to carry out a citizen's arrest of suspected offenders.

Opposition law and order spokesman Simon Power told an Auckland newspaper on Tuesday he welcomed communities taking responsibility for some aspects of law and order.

"But I would be disappointed if the (Guardian Angels) group had formed because of falling confidence in police," he said.

Mr Cawston said a perception that New Zealand police are not doing enough is an unfair one.

"They are doing their very best - and we are there to help them."

Mr Cawston said he hoped Henderson was just the beginning of the Guardian Angels presence in New Zealand.

"We are starting in Henderson - but we definitely intend this to be New Zealand-wide."

The Guardian Angels were established in the New York city suburb of the Bronx in 1979 as a response to crime on the streets and subways.

The group was established in several countries, including the US, Canada, South Africa and the United Kingdom.