



## Guardian Angels get little response from Meridian

By Brian Livingston

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— While waiting patiently on a brisk, sun drenched afternoon in Highland Park, six members of the Guardian Angels anti-crime organization had but one question for the people of Meridian.

Where are you?

"This is the fourth time we've been to Meridian to try and get patrols and chapters set up but we've not had any support from the local community," said Guardian Angel member Fred Harvey of Jackson. "I'm beginning to wonder if anyone here cares."

The Guardian Angels organization was founded Feb. 13, 1979 in New York City by Curtis Sliwa and has chapters in 13 countries around the world.

Sliwa originally created the organization to combat widespread violence and crime on the New York City subways. The organization patrols the streets and neighborhoods but also provides education programs and workshops for schools and businesses. The Jackson chapter was on hand to try and drum up a chapter to conduct neighborhood patrols. Bennie Jones, who heads the Jackson chapter of the GA, was noticeably disappointed he and his fellow Angels had driven down on a Saturday only to be met with apathy.

"Sooner or later these people will see the situation get so bad they will be wondering why isn't anything being done," Jones said. "Here was a golden opportunity to do something and nobody took advantage."

One person, from Clarke County, did show up to fill out an application so he could try and organize a chapter and patrol. Danny Cooper, a Vietnam veteran and former correctional officer, said he showed up to not only help out communities in Clarke County but to also try and make a difference in Meridian as well.

"I've always been interested in helping people," said Cooper after he finished filling out some paperwork. "If everyone would get involved in their communities the world would be a better and safer place for our children and elderly."

Jones, just like Harvey and newcomers to the Angels, Connie Harper and Michael Cagle of Jackson, have seen firsthand just how effective the patrols can be. They said when they walk through some of the toughest and notoriously dangerous areas of Jackson everyone, including the corner drug dealers, give them a level of respect. Jones said he's seen dealers leave drug hangouts when an Angel patrol approaches. He's not so naive to think they won't come back but he is sure for a short while the neighborhood is measurably safer.

"We can be a disruption to their activities," Jones said. "That's fine with us. Maybe that half hour presence by us saved a life that might have otherwise been lost had we not come through."

Cagle said he is comforted in the thought he is making a difference by the response he has seen from the general public. He said there have been many occasions where people have come up to the patrols and thanked the members for their time and dedication.

But there was no such occasion to celebrate Saturday with the lack of local support.

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