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## **Police chief, mayor delay blessing until hearing group's plan**

**Top cop, mayor withhold blessing until hearing group's plan**

**By Francis Scarcella**  
The Daily Item



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SUNBURY — A former convict has seen the error of his ways, and wants to bring the Guardian Angels to Sunbury to help others do the same.

Kerry Carter, 40, who served sentences totaling three years at the Northumberland County Prison, is warning city business owners, residents, law enforcement and government officials that, one way or another, the Guardian Angels will be patrolling a street near them.

Reaction among Valley officials to his effort to attract the international, nonprofit, volunteer organization ranges from opposition to support. Guardian Angels are highly trained, unarmed citizens who patrol streets and transportation systems. Members — there are 5,000 worldwide, in 60 chapters — are also trained to deter, prevent and report crime. A minimum of 12 weeks' training is required before one is certified to wear the Guardian Angels' red beret and jacket.

Carter may learn Saturday in a meeting with Guardian Angels founder Curtis Sliwa in Wilkes-Barre whether those red berets and jackets will be seen in Sunbury.

What he has seen in Sunbury disgusts him.

"I have been walking these streets for weeks, and I am not happy at what I see, because I see a lot of criminal activity and drugs all over the place," said Carter, a former city resident living in Millersburg who is opening Civil Enforcement Agency, in Sunbury, a service to help prisoners or their families locate a bail bondsmen.

"I also have been speaking with people about becoming a member of the Angels with me because the Crime Watch around here is a joke."

Sunbury Crime Watch President Connie Beegle would welcome them.

City Mayor David Persing said there is no need for them.

Northumberland County District Attorney Anthony Rosini doesn't want them around.

And city police Chief Steve Mazzeo is withholding judgment.

As are the Guardian Angels themselves.

"I have been in contact with the Angels and I will be meeting with them on Saturday and have spoke to various chapters in Pennsylvania, but they seemed a bit apprehensive about coming here," Carter said. "If they decide not to come, then I will start something here myself."

Twenty local residents are interested in joining, said Carter, who would not provide their names.

"I won't say who is behind me, but people have been responding to my idea," Carter said.

"Well, except the police."

Carter said he has informed Sunbury officers of his idea.

"I went to speak to the police, and they told me it wouldn't be a good idea, but I disagree," Carter said.

Cops: We need to talk

Before an outside group would make its presence known, it should meet and discuss its plans, Mazzeo said.

"If they decide to come here, then there needs to be a lot of work done before we give them our stamp of approval," Mazzeo said. "I would like to meet with them and talk about what they plan to do because PA law says you have to be Act 120-certified and be hired by a legitimate agency to be out performing arrests.

"We do not want any vigilante groups running around."

Persing agreed.

While he said the Guardian Angels aren't needed, he would be willing to listen to what they have to say.

"If they come," Persing said, "I would hope they would come and talk with my office first.

"Our Crime Watch is successful here already, so to look at a positive, I would say I hope they would be able to help our Crime Watch become more efficient."

Crime Watch has helped Mazzeo's force, whose numbers have dropped from 15 officers in 2005 to nine.

"Our guys are doing well with the resources we have," he said.

Officers dwindle, arrests up

Sunbury police made an average of 57.3 arrests each year from 2000 to 2008 for aggravated assault, and 61 in 2009, according to the Pennsylvania Uniform Crime Reporting System. They arrested 74.8 persons each year from 2000 to 2008 for larceny-theft, and 60 in 2009. They made 59 narcotics arrests in 2009, up from an average of 49.2, and 23 burglary arrests in 2009, up from an average of 21.6.

All told, Sunbury police — with fewer officers — made 768 arrests in 2009, up from an average of 706. The arrests in 2009 were the most since 932 in 2000.

Crime, said Rosini, the county district attorney, is under control.

"I do not feel the level of crime in Sunbury or Northumberland County is to the point that we need people out of the area to assist the police," Rosini said. "We do want members of our community to take an active role and report something out of the ordinary to the authorities, but again, we don't need that outside help."

Some community members who do take that active role belong to Crime Watch.

The group's president, Beegle, said she happy to learn of Carter's intentions.

"They will help us to get crime out," she said Saturday. "There is crime here, different groups here. All those gang groups. It's been worse in the past 10 years with all the fights around town. We will welcome (the Guardian Angels) here because they will help us with Crime Watch."

The Guardian Angels are needed, Beegle said.

"It's been worse than it has been," she said. "You see (crimes), but you don't hear about them."

Crime Watch has about 73 members, including 37 active participants who keep a close eye on anything that looks suspicious, Beegle said.

"We see anything that doesn't look right, we will call the police immediately," Beegle said.

The number of overall Crime Watch members is down from about 200 in 2000, she said.

"Many of them did not show up for the meetings," she said, "but they would watch from their homes. They didn't want to walk."

They feared retribution by criminals should they be identified over police scanners for reporting a crime.

"Sunbury is a nice place to live, but it has all these gang groups coming in," Beegle said, "and we need to get it out."

The Angels' early days

Sliwa started the "Magnificent 13" — 13 of his friends, family and neighbors, in 1977 — which in 1979 was renamed the Guardian Angels. They set up the first patrols that New York's subways in groups to deter violence, and patrolled neighborhoods and events.

Six Angels have died on patrol since 1983.

Sliwa has been in the spotlight for nearly a decade as he admitted to fabricating crimes in hopes of gaining acceptance of the Guardian Angels, and he also conducted a radio talk show where he chastised mafia kingpin John Gotti and his family for years.

Sliwa was shot in a New York taxi and blamed John Gotti Jr. for setting up the hit.

Sliwa testified at a recent Gotti Jr. trial, but Gotti Jr. was set free because of a hung jury.

Carter said he is not interested in the negative side of the Guardian Angels and possible public scrutiny.

He wants to just clean up Sunbury.

"I don't know about any of that stuff," he said.

"There are bad Guardian Angels and there are bad policemen as well," he said. "I am not a racist. I just want to make Sunbury safe and I think that this is such a small community and with the help of everyone, we can get rid of the drug dealers and all the crime because I have great ideas and I am going to get them some play."

Carter said he wouldn't reveal his ideas just yet, but if the Guardian Angels decide to move into Sunbury, they would be able to use his Market Street office as a base.

"They can use my office when on patrol," he said.

Guardian Angels are trained in cardio-pulmonary resuscitation, first aid, self-defense and reacting to a hostile conflict.

Carter said they would patrol streets, including Memorial Acres, a public housing development, from dusk to dawn.

"That is bad down there," Carter said, "and I would make sure we made it there to patrol. We would walk all of these streets."

Seven chapters of the Guardian Angels are operative in Pennsylvania: in Coatsville, Easton, Philadelphia, Slate Belt, Wilkes-Barre, Stroudsburg and York. Two are in developmental stages, in New Castle and Hazleton.

Hazleton Mayor and congressional candidate Lou Barletta said his city has not sought the Guardian Angles, but "I do respect the work that they have done, and their mission is credible.

"My hope would be that they will work with our existing neighborhood Crime Watch groups and our police department."

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