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May 16

[W-B's Angels praised](#)

The organization's founder, Curtis Sliwa, visits the area for a regional conference.

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Angels descended on Wilkes-Barre Saturday afternoon.

About 60 members of the Guardian Angels community watch organization convened in Wilkes-Barre for the group's Pennsylvania Regional Conference. Angels came from eight of the organization's nine Pennsylvania chapters and from neighboring states to share information and hear Guardian Angels founder and CEO Curtis Sliwa speak. They also conducted patrols of the city in the afternoon and at night.

Ray Tsukroff, a Guardian Angel from Hartford, Conn., said the conference, held at the Guardian Angels Wilkes-Barre Chapter Headquarters at 464 S. Franklin St., was largely about sharing information.

"Everyone has the same types of problems, but there are different ways of handling them," Tsukroff said.

Wilkes-Barre Chapter member Jason Gibbs said the organization also hoped the conference would raise awareness of the group's presence in the city and its goals.

"I hope the city, seeing all these Angels, sees that we're trying to do good for the city, instead of being afraid of us," Gibbs said.

Sliwa, in his address to the conference, spoke of his frustration with the glorification of organized crime in popular culture and the need for communities to help themselves, especially given the recent economic downturn.

"There are a lot of things people can do for themselves," Sliwa said, "like making sure their community is not bogged down with crime."

Sliwa called the Guardian Angels Wilkes-Barre Chapter the epicenter of the group's growth and development in Pennsylvania, and the city the only area he could remember in which a community watch program sought help from the group.

"You need to kiss the ground that the community watch and block watch are involved in because it's so hard to get their support," Sliwa said.

Sliwa said the city government's reception of the group was less welcoming, however, and that "that situation has not improved."

"I think, to them, Curtis Sliwa being here would be like pouring gasoline on the fire," Sliwa said.

The group's Wilkes-Barre chapter was founded in November of 2007. Sliwa said he had received e-mails from local residents, including Wilkes-Barre Crime Watch members, asking him to start a Guardian Angels chapter in the city, and contacted Scott Koppenhofer, now a Pennsylvania regional director, about starting one. Koppenhofer, of Wilkes-Barre, joined the Guardian Angels while he was stationed at a U.S. Navy base in San Diego.

The group now has eight active members who patrol the streets of Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton in teams of four or more. The group is also training five members from Hazleton in hopes of forming a new branch.

Angels distribute fliers to community members they encounter on patrols, hoping to recruit new members.

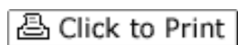
"The latest census said there were about 42,000 people in Wilkes-Barre and I have eight," Pennsylvania Regional Coordinator and Wilkes-Barre Chapter leader Jason Weston said.

The Guardian Angels seek to deter crime by informing police of suspicious activity, de-escalating violent situations and placing individuals under citizen's arrest when warranted.

Sliwa started the Guardian Angels in 1979 to combat violence and crime on the New York City subway system. The group now has chapters in 140 cities in 13 countries. Besides heading the group, Sliwa is also a radio talk show host and a motivational speaker.

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