

## Stroudsburg chapter of Guardians Angels ready to help deter crime (with video)

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July 21, 2008 6:00 AM

There's a new crime-fighting group in town after the newly formed Guardian Angels chapter in Stroudsburg formally got started Sunday.

Five members of the group will begin to perform safety patrols in the borough after a graduation from four months of training at the county control center in Snyder'sville.

David Piccioni of Stroudsburg helped organize the new chapter and will serve as chapter leader for the group.

"We're vigilant," Piccioni said. "We're vigilant about what we do but we're not vigilantes. We're not trying to take over the job of the police. We're here to help the law enforcement, not to be bullies."

The Alliance of Guardian Angels Inc. is a nonprofit public safety organization that began in New York City in 1979 as a way for citizens to fight back against rising crime. Members of the group form patrols to walk the streets wearing distinctive shirts, jackets and berets, aiming to make themselves a highly visible deterrent to crime.

Piccioni graduated from training with four other local Guardian Angels: Lisa Morrell of Stroudsburg, David Vazquez of Marshalls Creek, William Zalewski of Mount Bethel and Christopher Sierra of Bushkill.

The group's founder and president, Curtis Sliwa, is now a New York City radio host who is still active in his anti-crime crusade with the Guardian Angels. He spoke at the graduation ceremony to rail against gang-related crime, criminals he called "Uzi-toting, dope-sucking, psychopathic killing machines roaming the streets" and the gangsta-rap culture that warns against cooperating with police.

"The biggest nemesis I see in this country today, mostly in urban areas, but seething and slithering its way into suburban and rural areas is this concept that has come out of all this hip hop, rap crap and Reggaeton: That 'snitches get stitches and end up in ditches,'" he said.

He told graduates that their willingness to physically stop crime and training is what makes them different from a neighborhood crime watch.

"What makes the Guardian Angels so different from Crime Watch is we will get involved and do a physical intervention," Sliwa said. "If a fight is taking place, our job is going to be to physically separate the two people and if no crime is being committed, send them on their way. If a crime has been committed, we're going to exercise our right to make a citizen's arrest."

A traditional neighborhood watch group will report crimes to police, but not physically intervene. The training of Guardian Angels prepares them to safely and legally intervene when necessary, Sliwa said.

While the Guardian Angels organization had its origins in New York, all members of local chapters are residents of the areas they patrol. They work on a purely volunteer basis, patrol between dusk and

dawn and are free to patrol any necessary areas.

"None of this could have transpired if we hadn't had a local person who seized the responsibility and decided to do the heavy lifting," Sliwa said. "I couldn't do that from New York with all my responsibilities. It had to be local."

The Stroudsburg Guardian Angels have been in contact with local law enforcement agencies. Officers from both Stroud Area Regional Police and Pocono Mountain Regional Police attended Sunday's graduation.

Stroudsburg residents can expect to start seeing the colorful uniforms of the Angels soon, with patrols beginning this week.

"We're ready to patrol tonight if we have to," Piccioni said. "Now that we've had graduation we're ready to start right away."