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Guardian Angels volunteer crime fighters graduate

By Aaron Spencer

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The first wave of a renewed Jackson crimefighting force has finished training.

Ten volunteers for the Guardian Angels graduated today in Smith Park.

Members of Jackson's chapter range in age, sex and race. They join three veteran members of the team.

The Guardian Angels are distinguishable by their red berets and patrol city streets and public transportation systems in more than 102 cities in 12 countries. They are unarmed but are trained to make citizen's arrests. They're also trained in martial arts, law and first aid.

Curtis Sliwa, the founder of the group, oversaw the ceremony. Sliwa started the first chapter in New York in 1979.

"A lot of people think you're out of your minds," Sliwa told the graduates. "We need to continue to be the example, to shake them right down to the marrow of their bone."

Deputy chief of patrol for the Jackson Police Depart, Dwayne Thomas, attended the graduation to show JPD's support.

"We're not officially connected with them in any way," Thomas said, "But we support any group of citizens whose efforts are to help us in fighting crime."

Two previous Guardian Angel chapters in Jackson have fizzled out. One lasted from 1982-84. Another began and ended in the months following Hurricane Katrina. Sliwa blamed both failures on lack of government and police support.

"We didn't have this kind of reception from the police nor from elected officials," Sliwa said. "We hadn't established a track record, so they looked at us with a jaundiced eye."

The Jackson Guardian Angels patrol once a week in neighborhoods throughout Jackson.

For more information, go to www.guardianangels.org or call the Jackson Guardian Angels at (601) 559-0964.
