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Guardian Angels chapter recruits area residents for safety patrols

By ROBERT A. CRONKLETON
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Dianna Baker walked down the hallway of the Kansas City apartment building she manages, explaining to members of the Guardian Angels the story behind the graffiti on the walls.

Two tenants, she said, had been arguing over a boy, and the girls then started writing on the walls. The situation escalated and eventually led to a fight.

"Then they decided to turn to gang members who got involved," Baker told the volunteer crime-fighting group members, who were conducting a recruiting patrol last weekend.

The signature red berets of the Guardian Angels will be more visible in the coming weeks as the Kansas City chapter of the Guardian Angels steps up its efforts to attract new recruits.

The push for new members comes at the same time the local chapter is getting ready to graduate its first several recruits.

Jerry Mael, assistant director of the Kansas City chapter of the Guardian Angels, said the group hoped to have security patrols up and running by now.

"I would have to admit there is a certain level of frustration," Mael said, "but you also have to understand that chapters take anywhere from three months to a year to develop."

The length of time depends on participation and the number of members who sign up, Mael said. So far, the local chapter has attracted six full-time recruits.

Because it has so few recruits, the group will have to wait until it graduates more members before it can conduct weekly safety patrols, Mael said. Until then, it will focus on recruiting.

"Hopefully, by the spring, we will be able to do our own safety patrols instead of recruiting patrols," Mael said.

Even though the group will be doing only recruiting, Mael said he is optimistic that once people start seeing them on the street, more people will join.

"There is nothing better than people seeing the colors," Mael said. "We are trying to get ourselves seen."

So last weekend, Guardian Angels members patrolled the Westport area and attended the air show and a safety program at the Waldo Heights Apartments at 8101 Campbell St.

Baker, who is the property manager for the apartments, wanted to show them the graffiti because she hopes the Guardian Angels will be able to help eliminate crime there and in the neighborhood.

"This is what we are trying to get cleaned up," Baker said about the graffiti. She said she turned to the Guardian Angels, among others, because of their reputation.

"We just like what we heard they do," Baker said.

Jack "Flute" Holland, of Trenton, Ga., who is the national training director for the Guardian Angels, said the

local chapter is coming along fine now.

"We are hoping for a graduation at the absolute latest in the middle to end of October," Holland said. "It will probably be before then. It will really depend upon when we can get back out here."

He said the time it has taken the local chapter to get started is typical. Some chapters have taken as long as two years to get off the ground.

"As long as we can get a few people interested, we can start from there," Holland said. "Usually us being out on the streets as an example will bring other people in."

Efforts to bring the Guardian Angels to the Kansas City area began last year when the group was invited by the Rev. Golden Davis Sr., the pastor of Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church in Kansas City, Kan. He contacted the group after a drive-by shooting killed a 2-year-old girl earlier in the year.

"We had a really good push starting out," said Davis, whose church is accepting donations of items to help the local chapter. He said he hopes more churches get involved with the efforts.

The group has been training at the Forest Glen Estates clubhouse, 511 N. 64th St. in Kansas City, Kan.

Mael said he is hoping the group can attract enough recruits in the coming months, especially minorities, so that it can put together several weekly safety patrols.

"We see lots of areas where we want to do things, but we are not empowered enough to do that yet," Mael said. "That's our goal right now — to get the membership up where we do have that empowerment."

HOW TO HELP

•For information about joining the local Guardian Angels chapter, call Jerry Mael at 816-283-8554 or go to the local chapter's Web site at kansascity.guardianangels.org.

•To donate to the local Guardian Angels chapter, call Mael at 816-283-8554 or Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church at 913-321-0965.

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