

Guardian Angels

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For the spirit who is believed to protect and to guide a particular person see Guardian angel (spirit).

The **Guardian Angels** is a non-profit, international, volunteer organization of unarmed citizen crime patrollers. The Guardian Angels organization was founded in New York City in 1979 by Curtis Sliwa and has chapters in over 60 cities around the world.

Sliwa originally created the organization to combat widespread violence and crime on the New York City subways. The organization originally trained members to make citizen's arrests for violent crimes. The organization patrols the streets and neighborhoods but also provides education programs and workshops for schools and businesses.

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History

Founded by Curtis Sliwa in 1979, many of the original Angels worked at the east Fordham Road McDonald's in the Bronx where Sliwa was a manager, and had been members of Sliwa's volunteer garbage clean-up group, The Rock Brigade. Originally formed as "The Magnificent 13" referring to the original 13 members, the group soon became the "Guardian Angels" as membership expanded.

In the beginning, New York City Mayor Ed Koch publicly opposed the group. Many government officials also opposed the group whenever they attempted to open a chapter in their cities. Over the years, however, as the novelty of the organization and controversy has died down, and as citizen involvement and outreach has increased, there has been less public opposition to the group by government officials. Former Mayor Ed Koch later reversed his stance on the organization and former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and current New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg have publicly supported the group, although Toronto Mayor David Miller and Toronto Police Chief Bill Blair publicly oppose the group.

Two Guardian Angels have been killed while on a patrol. Frank Melvin was shot by a police officer in Newark, New Jersey in 1981. The officer who killed the angel alleged that Melvin was running toward his partner in a hostile manner, confirmed by witnesses. Juan Oliva was shot by a gang member in New York City in 1983. Two other former members were killed while intervening in muggings. There have been no more fatalities of Guardian Angels on a Safety Patrol since

then.

The Guardian Angels have established chapters in London, Tokyo, Houston, and Cape Town, South Africa. The Guardian Angels have also begun to include youth programs, teacher programs, disaster response, an Internet safety program called the CyberAngels, self-defense courses, as well as community outreach addressing issues beyond crime.

Political issues

Curtis Sliwa hosts a major New York radio talk show on WABC where he usually favors populist conservative views. However, the organization accepts members regardless of race, gender, age, religion, political view, or sexual orientation and attempts to avoid political issues. In the beginning, most members happened to be young, inner-city minorities who lived in the most crime-ridden areas.

Activities

The original and main Guardian Angels activity is the "Safety Patrol" in which members walk the streets or ride transit. Guardian Angels must be in uniform to represent the organization. They can be identified by their red berets and red jackets or white t-shirts with the Guardian Angels logo of an eye inside a shield with wings. Chapters operate similar to franchise networks supporting one another regionally under standard rules, regulations, and training. The Guardian Angels state that they are an equal opportunity organization that encourages diversity.

The organization accepts volunteers who do not have a recent or serious criminal record and are not members of a gang or racial hate group. In order to join the Safety Patrol program, members must be at least 16 years old. Younger members are allowed to participate in youth programs. Safety Patrol members are prohibited from carrying weapons and are physically searched before patrolling. They are trained in basic first aid, CPR, law, conflict resolution, communication, and basic martial arts. Members are paired up and follow the directions of a Patrol Leader. Members, however, are allowed to do whatever they feel is lawful and necessary in case their lives, or the lives of other citizens, are endangered or fear serious personal injury.

As of 2006, the Guardian Angels have been active in Orlando, FL.^[1] due to the increase in murder and crime rates. Boston, Massachusetts followed suit in 2007, at first to the opposition of Mayor Tom Menino who eventually supported the group due to the welcoming the Angels received from the people.

CyberAngels

CyberAngels was founded in 1995 by Gabriel Hatcher as an online "neighborhood watch". Originally the group monitored chatrooms directly with the intent of apprehending sexual predators. Later the group took what it had learned and changed its focus to educating police, schools, and families about on-line abuse and cyber crime. In 1998, CyberAngels received a Presidential Service Award.

Controversy

Since its inception, the organization has attracted controversy. During the 1970s, the City of New York was suffering from budget cuts and reduced public services. At the same time, urban crime in the United States was on the rise. New York City had the reputation of being one of the most dangerous cities in the world. The formation of an all-volunteer group of citizens to patrol the subways attracted considerable public and media attention. While some viewed them as citizens trying to improve their communities, others viewed them as vigilantes with little accountability and oversight. In addition to this, back in the 1970s government agencies were less interested in what is now termed as community outreach and public participation. Even though government agencies are now more likely to actively pursue citizen involvement and volunteering, the debate continues whether citizens should be helping to enforce the law and make citizen arrests or whether this duty should be left to the government or even private security firms.

Outside of the United States

In the years since their founding as thirteen people in the Bronx, the Angels have grown into a worldwide, multi-national group.

Japan

A local organization of the Guardian Angels was formed in Japan in 1996, which has a low violent crime rate compared to many other industrial countries. Recently, however, Japan is beginning to experience greater public disorder and criminal activity. The Guardian Angels Japan has chapters in most of the major cities and is only second to America in membership and activities. Keiji Oda, the founder and president of the Guardian Angels Japan, joined the Boston and New York City chapters in the 1980's. As with most American concepts, the Guardian Angels received both immediate acceptance and rejection in Japan. However, Oda succeeded in convincing Japanese officials that the organisation would be run by Japanese members for the Japanese people, and the principles of the organization were not just American but universal. Official acceptance culminated with a meeting with the Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi in 2005. The Guardian Angels were the first community organization in Japan to ever be awarded non-profit status.

United Kingdom

In London the Guardian Angels have been active since 1989, however, by 2007 they have become a very small group of around 12 and with very little activity. In Britain, the law requires citizens acting in self-defence to use "reasonable force", which leads to Guardian Angel training to centre on using the minimum possible force, and to only use force to prevent a dangerous situation from escalating. All violent crimes are reported to the police, and intervention leading to citizens' arrests (legal in Britain) or use of force is only employed in extreme cases.^[2]

Their presence in London was highly controversial in the first decade of existence, press articles having likened their actions to vigilantism. In 1989, discussion in Parliament raised the possibility of American members of the Guardian Angels being deported owing to their presence being "not conducive to the public good" but this was rejected.^[3]

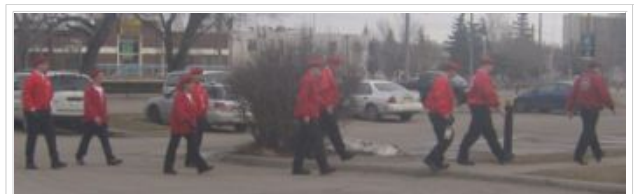
South Africa

The Guardian Angels South Africa was established in 2005 by a police officer in Cape Town. No other Guardian Angels chapter has ever been established and run by a police officer, although one chapter in America was established and run by the town's mayor. South Africa has the highest crime rate of any industrialized nation. Racial tensions and hostility still remain from the Apartheid era. The goal of the Guardian Angels South Africa is not only to address the enormous crime and violence problem, but also to bring people of all races to work together in communities of all races.

Canada

A Toronto chapter was originally formed in 1982 and ran until 1984. A smaller chapter ran briefly in the Parkdale area of Toronto in 1992 but disbanded. The 2005 Boxing Day shooting death of teenager Jane Creba in a busy downtown street provoked renewed attention to law-and-order issues in Canada, and Curtis Sliwa stated that he had been contacted by many Torontonians interested in having a local chapter. On July 13, 2006, a new chapter of the Guardian Angels Canada formed in Toronto, Ontario. However, both the mayor David Miller and the police chief Bill Blair stated they were not interested in trying what had not worked twice before.^[1]

When Sliwa arrived with 3 other Angels, Miller refused to meet with them, stating that police work was best left to the police. Despite the opposition of the Mayor, community groups, and the police chief, the Toronto Chapter moved ahead. 2006 mayoral candidate Jane Pitfield has expressed her support for the Guardian Angels as has former television anchor



In Calgary, Alberta, on March 24, 2007, a group of Guardian Angel trainees did one last training patrol, the day before their expected graduation day. They toured the East side of the downtown.

Peter Kent and former professional boxer (and now radio talk show host) Spider Jones.

A Vancouver chapter is in operation as of November 2006. There was a chapter there in the early 80's. Some of the alumni from that group are assisting with the new chapter.

A new Ottawa Chapter is planned, with an official opening in February 2007.

A Calgary chapter was set-up, with the first group finishing its training in March 2007.^[4]

An Edmonton chapter is being set-up, with the first group finishing its training in August 2007.^[5]

The Guardian Angels are looking into starting a chapter in Halifax. Recent outbreaks of violent crime in Halifax have prompted citizens to contact the Guardian Angels, urging them to start a chapter.^[6]

<http://www.thechronicleherald.ca/Front/882168.html>

New Zealand

In January 2006, the Guardian Angels opened its New Zealand Headquarters in the Henderson suburb of Waitakere City west of Auckland and New Zealand's fifth largest city. The NZ National Director is Andy "Chieftain" Cawston.

New Zealand's inaugural Guardian Angels Patrol was held on January 13, 2006. Since then, Guardian Angels have also been active in South Auckland; however the activities of this Chapter have been temporarily halted for logistical purposes.

On August 30, 2007 Curtis Sliwa graduated the Auckland CBD Chapter, led by Anna "Kimodo" Cruse. This Chapter's first official Patrol was on the following evening, August 31, 2007. These milestones were recorded and reported on TV3's Campbell Live news magazine:

<http://www.tv3.co.nz/VideoBrowseAll/NationalVideo/tabid/309/articleID/34002/Default.aspx#video>

Members of the Wellington Chapter held their inaugural training and orientation Patrol on October 6, 2006 in the Auckland CBD.

Within New Zealand, The International Alliance of Guardian Angels is recognized and registered as a Charitable Trust for tax purposes. Their headquarters is the Henderson Returned Services Association Inc. offices on Rainside Avenue, Henderson NZ.

Trivia

- The 1981 CBS made-for-TV movie "We're Fighting Back," featuring Bronx-born Ellen Barkin, was based on the Guardian Angels. Angels members signed releases giving Warner Bros. permission to depict their lives.
- The Clash recorded their tribute to the group, "Red Angel Dragnet," on their 1982 release "Combat Rock." The "Angels of N-Y-C" of the song lyrics is a reference to the Guardian Angels, and the "Red" in the title to their trademark red berets. The line "Not even five enforcement agencies can save their own, never mind the people" attests to the state of New York City at the time. The song is no unambiguous endorsement as Travis Bickle, the disturbed vigilante protagonist of Martin Scorsese's classic film *Taxi Driver*, is heavily referenced as well.
- Four members of the Japanese Guardian Angels appear in an episode of *Insomniac with Dave Attell* filmed in Tokyo. Dave interviews them before their attention is diverted to an (apparently) drunk and disorderly individual.
- The 2005 video game *Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories* features a vigilante parody of the Guardian Angels called the "Avenging Angels." Headed by a man called Jesus Max Sentenz, the Avenging Angels seek to rid Liberty City of crime in their own "special" way. The player has the option to work for the Angels, dispatching riotous mobs and bikers by any means possible, with special vehicles and wardrobes offered up as rewards. The Avenging Angels' uniforms also resemble the Guardian Angels' uniforms.

- Paul Reubens appears in Season 4, Episode 409 of *Reno 911!* as "Citizen's Patrolman Rick." He wears a red beret with pins, khaki shorts and shirt, and a matching khaki mini-cape.
- City Year corps members are often mistaken for Guardian Angels in some of the urban communities in which they serve.
- In 1998, Casio released a limited edition of G-Shock Guardian Angels Raysman watch (DW9300GA-4T, module 1584), dominated by Red with Black accent. Around metal bezel, it is printed "We Dare to Care", "Guardian Angels" & "Safety Patrol". The watch also feature a titanium caseback with Guardian Angels logo.

References

1. ^ "Guardian Angels launch city patrol, expand across US (http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2007/03/31/guardian_angels_launch_city_patrol_expand_across_us/)", *Boston Globe*, March 31, 2007. Retrieved on 2007-07-24.
2. ^ Fallen Angels (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/4174580.stm)
3. ^ Foreign & Commonwealth Affairs (http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm19889/cmhansrd/1989-01-30/Writtens-1.html)
4. ^ "Angels test their wings (http://www.canada.com/calgaryherald/news/story.html?id=b250c7ff-dfd9-47ed-aac5-55e043e188e1&k=18624)", *Calgary Herald*, March 25, 2007, p. B3. Retrieved on 2007-03-25.
5. ^ "In the presence of Angels (http://www.edmontonsun.com/News/Edmonton/2007/03/25/3829689.html)", *Edmonton Sun*, March 25, 2007. Retrieved on 2007-03-25.
6. ^ "Guardian Angels visiting Halifax (http://www.hfxnews.ca/index.cfm?sid=61369&sc=89)", *The Daily News*, September 11, 2007. Retrieved on 2007-09-11.

External links

- Guardian Angels official website (http://www.guardianangels.org)
- CyberAngels official website (http://www.cyberangels.org)
- Guardian Angels Public Discussion Board (http://www.guardianangels.ws)
- Guardian Angels Japanese chapters (http://www.guardianangels.or.jp)
- Extra info about London Guardian Angels (http://www.communigate.co.uk/london/guardianangels)
- Guardian Angels Canada (http://www.guardianangelscanada.org)
- Curtis Sliwa speaks about the GA from the subway platform where it all started (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3kp2pao1I7Q)

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