

8 of 81 DOCUMENTS

Newsday

Newsday (New York)

December 9, 2008 Tuesday
ALL EDITIONS

Guardian Angels hit streets; Patchogue reacts coolly to arrival of group, whose leader says it will "stop the hunting" of Hispanics

BYLINE: BY DAVE MARCUS. dave.marcus@newsday.com

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. A07

LENGTH: 510 words

Declaring "we are here to help," a dozen Guardian Angels arrived in Patchogue yesterday morning with promises to prevent bias crimes.

But leaders of the village reacted coolly to founder Curtis Sliwa's assertion that the volunteers will "stop the hunting" of Hispanics.

Sliwa said the volunteer patrols will rove sidewalks at night to quell conflicts, make citizen's arrests and serve as a "visual deterrence" to criminals. He decried last month's killing of Ecuadorean immigrant Marcelo Lucero, saying that all residents - including those who are undocumented - need protection.

The Guardian Angels were invited by Hispanics Across America, an advocacy group based in Manhattan. In a news conference, Fernando Mateo, president of the group, called the patrols a "defense mechanism" against the attacks.

Some residents who noticed the Guardian Angels - with their distinctive red jackets and berets - shook their heads skeptically at what they called a display intended for the media. Surrounded by TV cameras at the site where Lucero was stabbed to death, Mateo told Sliwa that Hispanics feel endangered in Patchogue.

At a forum on harassment and violence at the Congregational Church last Wednesday, Mateo claimed, "at least 100 people showed up to file complaints." Although police and the Suffolk District Attorney's office haven't given an exact number, they say it was closer to 20.

"I'm concerned that this is a publicity stunt, but if it accomplishes something good it's OK," said resident Christopher Capobianco. He met Mateo years before, when both were in the floor-covering business and before Mateo became a prominent activist in New York. He wonders why Mateo hasn't reached out to Patchogue leaders who are working to bridge gaps between whites and Hispanics.

Mayor Paul Pontieri, who was born and raised just two blocks from the site of the killing, is more skeptical. Mateo has breezed in for news conferences, the mayor said, but has yet to contact village officials. Suffolk County Police already have stepped up patrols, Pontieri said. "The village of Patchogue has always taken care of its own issues."

Mateo said Patchogue officials have failed to respond to immigrants' concerns. "He did nothing about the problem. He should be the one saying, 'What do we need to do, how can we make the changes necessary?'" Mateo said of Pontieri.

Guardian Angels hit streets; Patchogue reacts coolly to arrival of group, whose leader says it will "stop the hunting" of Hispanics
Newsday (New York) December 9, 2008 Tuesday

eri. "The reason we haven't worked with the political and elected leaders in Suffolk is that they're part of the problem, not part of the solution."

Still, the Guardian Angels have many admirers in the village. "We could always use the extra safety," said Manuel Roman, a retired postal worker.

The Guardian Angels, a nonprofit group formed to combat crime in New York City 29 years ago, provides unarmed patrol to neighborhoods across the country and the world.

The Suffolk Police did not return calls for comment.

The group plans to send six to eight volunteers to Patchogue every night, then split them into two patrol units, said founding member Arnaldo Salinas. The patrols would stay for at least several weeks, he said.

LOAD-DATE: December 9, 2008

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

GRAPHIC: PHOTO BY JAMES CARBONE - Guardian Angels walk Main Street yesterday in Patchogue, where an Ecuadorean immigrant was stabbed to death recently in an apparent bias crime.

PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newspaper

Copyright 2008 Newsday, Inc.