

## The Patriot-News

### Guardian Angels bring message of hope to city

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**BY BARBARA MILLER** [barbmiller@patriot-news.com](mailto:barbmiller@patriot-news.com)

Clad in their trademark red berets and white T-shirts with angel wings, 13 Guardian Angels from York marched through areas of Harrisburg plagued by recent gunfire, inviting residents to take back their neighborhoods.

They walked down Cameron Street, past the bullet-pierced window of a drug rehabilitation center, up Market Street to 13th Street.

"The criminals are only getting away with what we allow them to get away with," said Mike Smith, head of the York chapter of the Guardian Angels, as he and York County officials came to offer assistance in setting up a local Guardian Angels chapter.

Residents greeted them with peace signs, beeping horns and thanks.

Smith said the Guardian Angels, unarmed but trained in self-defense, are a visual deterrent to crime during their weekly patrols. In York, two armed sheriff's deputies accompany them, and the patrols are credited with helping achieve a 15 percent drop in crime in the last five months, said York County Commissioner Steve Chronister, who helped arrange the combined patrols.

"We're definitely ready for it," said Harrisburg resident Charles Dominick. "When my children are out here, I'd love to have them out."

Smith, 41, a native of York, is a former drug dealer who started the Guardian Angels chapter after losing his brother to gun violence there a year ago.

"I come from this. I understand what it is," he said, adding that he received calls from Harrisburg residents who've had enough of the violence. "I think they're fed up. This is something they can do."

Some York residents, such as Judd Denson, joined the Guardian Angels after experiencing street violence.

"I lost a son to street violence two years ago next month. I'm just hoping I can play a part in stopping it," Denson said.

Smith also has a program for youth -- the Temple Guards, a champion drill team.

"They have to have some deterrent to the lifestyle. They need a job component, a mentoring program," he said.

He said he's received calls from several prospective leaders of a Harrisburg Guardian Angels chapter.

"We will help train them, but we can't patrol their streets for them," Smith said.