

# Guardian Angels hit streets of Santa Cruz

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SANTA CRUZ — Two members of the Guardian Angels, a citizen's group of crime-stoppers, patrolled the Pacific Garden Mall Friday night, shaking hands, acknowledging welcomes and debating their presence in Santa Cruz with passers-by.

Their presence Saturday evening, however, was questionable, with merchants, police officers and street people saying they had not seen members of the group, who walk the streets wearing their trademark red berets and Guardian Angels T-shirts.

The Angels say they are here to make the area safer for street people and victims of crimes.

They were attracted by national press and television accounts of "troll busting," Santa Cruz's peculiar variety of violence against its street people who are dubbed "trolls" because many of them sleep under the town's bridges in wet weather.

The Angels' welcome has been mixed.

Police, politicians and many residents of the town feel the "troll-busting story" has been vastly overplayed. They say that the Guardian Angels are another escala-

tion in a problem that is no different here than any other place in the U.S.

They also say that incidents of "troll busting" have decreased over the past two months, and that all the heat is coming from press and television coverage which is caught up in the symbols of "trolls" and "troll busting" in a fairy-tale town like Santa Cruz.

However, volunteers at the local soup kitchen and many of the street people say the Angels' presence is welcome and needed here.

They say the incidence of violence and harassment of the homeless is continuing at about the same rate it always has.

Gerald, a street person who has been around so long he's now called "the mayor of the Mall," said Friday night as the duo of Angels passed by, "I'd rather have them around than the police. I think the Angels care more about the street people than the police do.

"And, everybody needs a Guardian Angel."

But one street person who gave his name as "Tony" said he thought the Angels' arrival was bad news.

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## Guardian Angels

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"I grew up with a lot of the Guardian Angels, and let me tell you, they're no angels," the New York native said.

The Angels were patrolling city streets as late as 3 a.m. Saturday, according to Tony.

John McKim, a San Francisco trouble-shooter for the national organization of Guardian Angels, was one of the two men patrolling the Mall Friday.

He was saying that patrols would be beefed up and that the Angels want to start a local chapter with only local people involved.

He said that after being in town for a couple of days, he has been told often that

the trolls aren't the only ones who need protection.

During his walk on the Mall Friday night, many young and not-so-young persons told him tales of violence they, or their friends, had experienced.

He said he'd heard accounts of rapes, kidnappings and beatings and was assuring the people who stopped to talk with him that the Guardian Angels would step in wherever they see criminal violence happening.

The Angels move to stop the violence, or the crime against property, and make citizens' arrests.

He said that in January he would be speaking to groups and civic leaders to get

support and understanding for a local chapter.

He was asked why the Angels were so quick to come in and defend the street people, who seemingly won't support and can't defend themselves.

McKim said all citizens, whether they appear to be contributors or only beneficiaries of the system, must be protected from violence.

Overall, the people who visited and walked the Pacific Garden Mall Friday night gave McKim and his partner a gracious welcome.

**Sentinel Staff Writer Laurie Slothower contributed to this report**