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## Believing in Angels

By KERRY DIOTTE

Dave Schroder believes in Angels. The local realtor has picked up the ball on the notion of starting an Edmonton chapter of the Guardian Angels volunteer street patrol group, which operates in 82 cities worldwide.

The 47 year old looks like he'd be more comfortable in a suit than the Angels's trademark red beret. But he hopes to see an Edmonton chapter begin training members this spring. That's been talked about for months, but the Angels's Canadian head office fell on financial hard times.

Calgary's Angels will finish training at the end of March and Schroder figures an Edmonton chapter would begin a three-month-long training process after that.

Schroder and his backers attended a community hall crime awareness meeting in Beverly this week that saw 30 or so people show up, including five Edmonton Police Service officers.

Schroder quickly found himself defending the organization founded by Curtis Sliwa in Brooklyn, New York, in 1979. The Angels have long had to quell fears that they're some kind of vigilante force meting out justice on criminals.

"I respect the police force in this city," said Schroder, as the five members of the EPS listened to him. "But with their manpower they can't be everywhere all the time."

While EPS Chief Mike Boyd has said he'll keep an open mind about an Angels chapter, there's still skepticism.

In May, EPS union boss Staff Sgt. Peter Ratcliff called the Guardian Angels "over-the-top vigilantes," adding, "We don't need them or anything like them."

Even at this week's public meeting, police warned citizens should be cautious of breaking up assaults. The cops advise to call the police immediately, but don't try to stop assaults yourself. Doing so could get you killed or sued.

But Schroder says he couldn't walk away from someone being attacked.

"Yes, you call police immediately if you see an attack," said Schroder, former president of the Edmonton Real Estate Board.

"But if you're walking with buddies and you see a woman or an elderly person being beaten, would you just call police and walk away? I couldn't. I'd try to stop it. Angels only would use reasonable and legal force to stop an attack and hold a suspect for police."

He only wishes someone would have come to his defence years ago when he was jumped and beaten by five or six guys outside a house party in Ottewell.

But what made him resolve to see an Angels chapter here? "I was sickened to see what happened to Stefan Conley," said Schroder. Four teens face manslaughter charges following the March 2, 2006, death of Conley, 35, on a city bus.

Schroder says he's eager to meet Mayor Stephen Mandel and EPS Chief Mike Boyd and wants to let them know any chapter here would be operated as a community effort.

He's seeking interested citizens to be members. They'd have to clear a standard police criminal check, he said. "I'm telling people, 'If you'd like to build a Guardian Angels chapter here, I'd like to talk to you.' "

He's also interested in working closely with police given the high-profile media campaign against violence and gangs called Enough is Enough. "If they feel enough really is enough, let's work together," said Schroder.