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Guardian Angels hit Calgary streets

By [NADIA MOHARIB](#), SUN MEDIA

The sloppy group of absolutely polluted street people pile up outside a downtown restaurant making themselves at home leaning against tires of cars owned by patrons who dine on lobster tails inside.

But the makeshift party spot is cleared when a group of Guardian Angels, who hit Calgary streets for the first time last night, politely asks them to move along.

"Run along," one of the disgruntled revellers says mockingly while tripping past empty beer cans.

Another man, who clearly hasn't bathed in days and is unaware his nose needs wiping, struggles to pose for the camera while standing -- what for most folk might be -- a little too close for comfort.

But the newly minted Angels didn't volunteer for a candy-coated, sanitized way to contribute to their city.

They are walking the streets twice a week to try to help clean up crime, as they say to be "eyes and ears" for police.

The group of eight seemingly got off on the wrong foot with Chief Jack Beaton, however, admonishing the U.S.-based volunteer crime-fighters for not adequately informing police of their plans.

The group hopes to eventually get cops, city officials and social service agencies on side, but until then they just want to do their job in a positive, safe, legal manner, Angel Steve Saretsky said.

If their patrol from near the Drop-In Centre and east and west along the bike path is any indicator, the group might have some allies among the drug addicts and homeless who gather on grassy spots, and others happy to see them.

"Keep up the good work, guys," a jogger shouts.

The thin red line moves on, weaving toward Eau Claire, meeting and greeting and looking for trouble they hope to stamp out.

Digging through the blankets of abandoned beds laid out on rocks overlooking the Bow River under a bridge, Saretsky finds a syringe which he plops in to a plastic jar to dispose of later.

Groups settled in for the night against trees stare at the Angels through glazed eyes, while others scatter at the mere sight.

Sheila Byrne, who says she's homeless and a crack addict, is thrilled to see the Angels.

"Hey," she shouts while running to catch up.

"I'm hammered," she says, pointing out the obvious.

"I'm really happy to see you in town."

"So what's the scoop?" she asks. "Am I arrested because I just drank some beer by the river?"

"It's dangerous out here," she warns.

"The cops wear Kevlar vests -- I worry about you guys. You should go in bigger teams."

Soon after a cruiser whips by just as the Angels break up a fight.

They say cops can't be everywhere and some people are happy to see the boys in blue get a little help.

"Thanks for coming out," says a would-be victim in the scrap.

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