

The New Show Off Broadway: 46th Street

By STEVEN ERLANGER

The photographers outnumbered the drug dealers Monday night along Restaurant Row, the block of West 46th Street, between Eighth and Ninth Avenues that has become the temporary touchstone for New York City's agonized struggle with crack.

Throughout the night and early yesterday morning, frequent police patrols, both uniformed and not — "I've never seen so many bosses down here," said one officer — passed strolling bands of Guardian Angels pursued by camera crews and columnists in the stifling air. The transvestites stared, transfixed by the bizarre.

The temperature was proverbially hot, but tempers were not. Politesse seemed to be the order of the night, especially between the Angels and the beat cops, who feel no special love for these muscled young men whose presence on the street, at the request and subsidy of 15 restaurant owners, is viewed by many of the officers as a public humiliation.

"I think the idea of the Guardian Angels is

A.V.T. 6/15/88

The 'Angels' are drawing reporters, and tourists, too.

fine, but it doesn't always manifest itself very well," said another police officer, who said that given all the attention, he preferred anonymity. "The problem is that there are good and bad Angels like there are good and bad cops and good and bad reporters. And some of them are pretty young, and they try to use their muscles instead of their brains."

But the Angels are undoubtedly a draw, to tourists as well as reporters. Vern B and Leonore Moore of Toronto like the Joe Allen's restaurant at home, so they came to the source at 343 West 46th Street, both Sunday and Monday evenings.

"I must say, when we came here Sunday,

I was pretty shook up," said Mr. Moore, recently retired, who had been told about the stabbing Saturday night of a 16-year-old Guardian Angel, Illya Lichtenberg. "The doorman said to be careful, and I thought, 'Crises! Maybe we're naive.'"

Mrs. Moore punched her husband's arm and said: "I'm not naive! I wasn't the least bit afraid!"

Mr. Moore smiled crookedly, chagrined. "I must admit I was glad to see those Guardian Angels," he said.

"And now it's the cleanest street in New York," Mrs. Moore said.

That is a significant change from a week ago, before the Guardian Angels began their patrols, residents said. John Shackelford manages the five squalid residential hotels that embody the now notorious street corner of Eighth Avenue at 46th Street. From a humid little office in the building next to St. Luke's Lutheran Church, Mr. Shackelford can see "the dealing and the smoking and the fighting over turf and who's selling the

Continued on Page B4

New Show In Town: 46th Street

Continued From Page B1

bad stuff," he said in a talk around midnight yesterday.

Matters had worsened in the past month, he said, after about a dozen crack dealers were evicted from the buildings and started dealing on the street, where the summer heat would have brought them anyway. "I've been in a lot of fights with dealers," said Mr. Shackelford, who wears rings on nearly every finger and a zircon earring. "But I'm a religious man, and I don't fear no man."

The problem, he said, was that there were few police officers on patrol in the early hours, and that the cops would not or could not send more.

"When the cops went home at 2 in the morning, from 2 A.M. to 8 A.M. it was like Vietnam out there. You wouldn't see feet outside that door."

The Angels are the best thing that's ever happened to this neighborhood," he said.

Complaints on 47th and 49th

On the stoop outside the office, a woman was asked about complaints from residents of 47th and 49th Streets that the crack dealers had simply moved their operations. "I don't live there," she said shrugging. "I live here."

For the Rev. Kathleen Mandeville, vicar of St. Clement's Episcopal Church on 46th Street between Ninth and 10th Avenues, the residents' work to secure a receiver for the buildings, the nonprofit Clinton Housing Development Company, was more important than the restaurant owners' importing Guardian Angels. It was Clinton Housing that went to court and evicted the dealers a month ago.

"You want to empower people rather than bring in outsiders to solve their problems," Ms. Mandeville said. "You need mass-based community action, organized around an issue, which is how drugs and economics come into play in midtown, rather than have the merchants do it."

'Well-Behaved Crackheads'

Another resident of Restaurant Row, who asked not to be identified, said the block was well patrolled and had never been very dangerous. He said the real problem was at the corners, near the avenues.

"The crackheads are pretty well behaved, unsightly but not really threatening," he said. "This is an issue just because crack is lapping up against the middle class. The biggest whiners in New York are the restaurant owners."

He said he often returned home at night to find crack users smoking the powerful cocaine derivative on his stoop. "That's unpleasant, but they usually say good evening," he said. "I got home tonight around 7 to find a TV cameraman there, and he didn't move an inch or say hello."

In the former Cafe de France, donated for the Guardian Angels' use five army cots, a shower, two televisions and two telephones. Two Angels wearing red berets lounged in front of a mural of two French milkmaids in Touraine.

It was after the 6 P.M. news and well before the 11 o'clock edition. The Angels' founder, Curtis Shiwa, was free to talk. As he described his goal of clearing crack dealers from 42d Street to 49th Street and as far west as 10th Avenue, he rubbed his midriff, as if he had indigestion.

Feasting With 'Angels'

That led to a discussion of the food the restaurants were providing the Angels — ribs and all the fixings from Joe Allen's this night. "Now we've got all this food, a lot of it these guys can't even pronounce," Mr. Shiwa said.

The most excitement of the night came just after 11 o'clock, when a young man, Raimundo Vargas, fell from the fifth-floor fire escape of a building at 46th Street and Ninth Avenue. Luckily he hit an awning before he hit the sidewalk and survived the fall.

At the Cafe de France, a witness said, Mr. Shiwa emerged to tell photographers and a French television crew. "It's on the radio — somebody went out a window."

At the scene, ambulances and patrol cars blocked half the avenue. The police did their work while the Angels milled about, keeping back a sparse crowd.

Just before 2 A.M., two police officers stood at the corner of 46th and Eighth. An Angel patrol walked by. A transvestite started to cross the street, then turned, pulling down a halter top and sticking out his tongue. A wild-eyed man, looking for crack, turned in circles. Two horse-drawn carriages, their occupants staring, clattered uptown.