

Good Question: Main Street Cleanup

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Last Update: 10/02 11:06 am



KANSAS CITY, Mo. - The Guardian Angels were recently in town and area volunteers will soon be organizing a chapter in Kansas City. But the people in red that have been seen up and down Main Street are not the Guardian Angels.

You see them riding, sweeping, talking and walking. To get the answer as to who the red-shirted people are, you have to travel back in time.

Even before the turn of the century, Main Street was where Kansas City began to grow. It was home to the city's first rail line and grew with the rail, south from the river to Union Station, then connecting the southern developments like the Country Club Plaza and Waldo.

Like then, Main Street is still important to the city, but it's grown old with wear.

"It needs to be cleaned up," resident Nicky Stanke said.

That's where the red shirts come in. They sweep, scrape and communicate.

"These are our street ambassadors," Diane Burnett said.

They plant and landscape and remove a lot of graffiti.

"People don't think Main Street has a graffiti problem because we remove it everyday, every hour," Burnett said.

Twelve full-time street ambassadors began work in May for the Main Street Community Improvement District, a non-profit organization that collects fees from businesses and residents that line Main Street from 27th

Street to 47th Street.

"The stakeholders on this street voted to pay an assessment to have more services above and beyond the city services," Burnett said.

Burnett says once 51 percent of the people along Main Street agreed to a community improvement district, the steering committee presented the plan to the city council. They approved a tax hike for the area.

"It's probably 99 percent commercial," Burnett said.

Those along Main Street pay 5 cents per square foot of space, and 23 cents per \$100 of valuated land. That adds up to roughly \$500,000 a year for Main Street.

Stanke lives in the Ponce de Leon condos, the only building owned by residents along the Main Street corridor. Each resident pays roughly \$200 more than other Kansas City residents for the service.

"I don't mind," Stanke said. "We on Main Street are the beneficiaries, so we should pay for it."

The life on the community improvement district is eight years. The group will have to meet the same criteria to renew it, as it did to begin it.