

# Seniors Fighting Crime

## Grandparents hit streets of Akron to give safety tips

by Holly Pupino

Ethel Coup, 72, wasn't about to let blowing snow and frigid temperatures deter her from her mission Tuesday afternoon.

"You've got to walk the walk, you just can't talk the talk," said the feisty Firestone Heights senior, her metal cane finding precarious purchase on snow slicked pavement as she strode briskly along Wheeler Street.

Coup was one of a dozen Grandparents Against Sexual Predators (GASP) members who joined with two dozen city of Akron and University of Akron police officers and Summit County sheriff's deputies to paper the East Exchange Street neighborhood with crime prevention and safety tips.

"We (GASP) are out to show we are against sexual assault and crime," said Coup.

Several thousand bright green door hangers with crime prevention and safety tips printed on both sides, were slid inside screen doors, draped on door handles and hung from mailboxes by the group to raise safety awareness among the neighborhood's residents, mainly college students.

The effort was a response to three rapes, the most recent on Jan. 7, and a rash of robberies that have plagued the neighborhood bordering the UA campus for the last several months.

Anne Spahr of the Rape Crisis Center of Medina and Summit Counties, wrapped in scarf and gloves, said she believed Tuesday's safety awareness effort was very important.

"If just a few people stop and consider their personal safety, then it (effort) will be well worth it," said Spahr.

University of Akron police Sgt. Chad Cunningham said the goal Tuesday was to hang a tip sheet on "every door we possibly can." He said more than 4,000 of the hangers were printed.

"We are all working together to make this a safer community," Cunningham said.

The neighborhood, made up mainly of rental houses, was broken down into five color-coded sections. Teams were assigned to each section.

John Essex, 63, was assigned to the blue team with Coup.

Essex, who said he came out Tuesday to make a difference, noted that last summer he participated in the search for Jessie Marie Davis, the Lake Township woman who was missing for several days before her body and that of her unborn baby were found.

The safety tip hangers that Essex and others placed on doors included advice such as: be alert and aware of your surroundings; lock doors and windows; walk with a friend whenever possible; don't leave valuables in plain view; engrave security number on all valuables; along with a number of other common sense tips and a list of emergency phone numbers.

At one house a young woman came to the door wrapped only in a bathrobe. As she took the tip sheet from a volunteer, she offered she had rushed to the door straight from the shower.

"Well that's one thing you shouldn't do — come to door with just a robe on," the volunteer said.

Last week police arrested Christopher Butts, 24, a utility worker and charged him in two of the rapes.

In addition, police have in custody John Wayne St. Clair, 24, of Akron, who police say admitted to 22 break-ins in the East Exchange neighborhood.