

## METROLAND online

### Neighbors in Black

Frustrated by what they see as a lack of police response, local goths initiate crime patrol in Albany's "student ghetto"

On Tuesday night, Myron Getman stood on the corner of Quail Street and Western Avenue in Albany, dressed in a long black trench coat, covered in beads of water that trickled down the edges of his wide-brimmed hat. With his imposing stature and a jutting, scraggly goatee, Getman is the kind of guy you probably would avoid on a dark, wet night like this. But according to Getman, he was there because he was tired of hearing stories from his friends about how scared they are to be living in Albany's "student ghetto." Horror stories about their apartments being broken into and robbed one week and then again the next, stories of friends being surrounded and beaten by six men—"eight if you count the two guys who stood guard on the corners as lookouts."



Getman does not live in this neighborhood any more, but he can remember when he did as a student. He now lives a few blocks away, and says that now he just wants to help. A regular in the goth-music scene, a DJ and member of goth band the Flying Buttresses, Getman decided to hold a "goth neighborhood walk" after a discussion on his blog, [baron-army.livejournal.com](http://baron-army.livejournal.com), was flooded with stories about bad experiences with crime and police in Albany. Two of his friends, Gail Dorn and Seth Schwartz, showed up to help him.

"I think the weather scared some people away," said Getman, as he strolled down Quail with his friends, handing out flyers to coeds.

Getman said he contacted Albany Police Sgt. Fred Aliberti and was greeted with "a terse response, quite a terse response."

Aliberti said he encouraged Getman to join the city's police-sanctioned Midtown Neighborhood Watch. He insisted that cooperation between watch groups and the APD is essential. "If a neighborhood watch is not working with police, how are they going to become knowledgeable about the process and procedures? The Midtown Watch reports all kinds of codes violations, broken street lights, and they go through that whole process."

Getman said he is not interested in being part of a police-organized watch that meets when told to. He says that isn't the kind of vibe that will get students to come out to watch meetings. "When you're a student, it's like you don't give a shit where you live," he explained. "You might not even change your sheets." Getman said he thinks a watch led by residents—with flexible hours to allow students a more wide-open window of time to take part—might lead to more participation.

Getman's decision to start a neighborhood watch in the Pine Hills section of Albany is reminiscent of Anton Konev's push to start a watch in the neighborhood around this time last year [Newsfront, Nov. 10, 2005]. Konev struggled at first to gain police support, while the police worried whether

## **METROLAND online**

Konev was looking to attack them in the press or simply work with them. Konev had his stories as well—stories about friends being mugged, and actually being attacked himself. According to Konev, his watch is doing quite well. The Midtown Neighborhood Watch meets on Monday and Thursday nights, and according to Konev, “There has been a healthy turnover of old volunteers and new students.” Konev says he thinks things have gotten better in the neighborhood since the watch started.

“We haven’t come across any crime yet,” he reported, “but we are always updated on everything going on. Like recently, a couple of students were burglarized. We are constantly updated through e-mail from police. So, so far, so good.”

According to Aliberti, the Midtown Watch is “a prime example of citizens and the police department working together in a positive community policing atmosphere.”

While business owners accepted Getman’s flyers, their typical responses afterward were “We already have a neighborhood watch,” and “We don’t have many problems in this area.”

Getman and his group strolled the streets, chatting about bands like Grave 45 and Joy Division, stopping to drop off literature, and periodically returning to the corner of Quail and Western, where police cars would sometimes park in front of a fire hydrant to run into Pepper Jack’s for a bite to eat. After a walk up to Stewart’s on Quail and back around to Western, Getman and Dorn exclaimed, “Look! They are still there,” noticing two officers who had been and still were eating at Pepper Jack’s.

The Albany Police are at the root of Getman’s motivation for starting his watch. Getman insisted that the police simply are not getting out and taking care of situations they know about. He said his friend who was attacked by six men near the Stewart’s on Quail was told by the police when he filed a report that “they’ve been aware of similar attacks taking place over the last week or so in the same area.” Getman said his friends who have had problems in the “student ghetto” have simply been blown off by the APD. Officers asked them questions like, “What do you want us to do about it?” when calling about groups of kids fighting on the street, and told to physically “kick” a sleeping transient out of the entryway to an apartment building. Aliberti insisted, however, that the midtown area is headed in the right direction, and he said that he thinks Getman and his friends might have a “perception problem” regarding the APD. He further insisted that the APD needs to have open lines of communication with the community, just as a neighborhood watch should have with the APD.

Getman’s blog features a long rant about crime in Albany, the experiences of his friends, and the refrain, “The Albany Police Department is Dysfunctional.” The message board underneath the thread contains many testimonials, including one from user “doomsday virus” that says: “half the time i try and call the police about neighborhood disturbances (fights, rock/bottle throwing, vandalism, etc) they laugh and say things like ‘what do you want us to do about it’ (actual quote right there). more often than not, they don’t even show up.”

—David King

*dking@metroland.net*