

Stranded bus riders find Utah has a big heart

Hospitality » Man takes strangers into his home.

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[The Salt Lake Tribune](#)

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West Valley City » When Floyd Mann learned dozens of travelers were stranded at Salt Lake City's bus station, he decided -- with a nudge from his wife -- to provide some help.

Mann and his friend Ron Gilder went shopping back on Dec. 22 and loaded up his car with water, soups, chips, snack bars and paper supplies. They dropped off everything at the bus station, where they then found many people had been stuck there for several days.

So Mann asked if there was anyone who wanted to go to his home to freshen up. Several people accepted his offer.

That was the beginning of Mann's six-day adventure of inviting 11 Latino strangers into his cozy, modest home during Christmas week. Mann only speaks English and all but one of his guests only spoke Spanish.

Most of them, farm and construction workers, were on their way to visit family for the holidays and to find jobs in Oregon and Washington. But, they were in Salt Lake City waiting for the weather to clear and buses to head north. Some said they didn't even have money for food, never the less for a hotel.

Martin Sanchez, 38, and his son, Juan Manuel, 18, both Mexican immigrants, were heading to Yakima, Wash., and had been sleeping at the station in Salt Lake City for a week before Mann picked them up. He said he went with Mann hoping to get something to eat.

The group at the bus station Dec. 22 couldn't fit into Mann's car, so he paid for two cabs to ship the two women and nine men to his three-bedroom West Valley City home.

There, the strangers showered, washed their laundry and relaxed on Mann's two sofas and the floor, where they also slept. Mann put out a sandwich buffet with soups and desserts on his four-person, wooden kitchen table. Then, he went to buy groceries, including lots of salsa, and beer for the gang.

The women and a man left the first day, leaving eight men.

Mann, a 54-year-old retired business owner who is a self-described treasure hunter, joked he spent most of the time in the kitchen. Each morning, he made the works -- including eggs, meats, potatoes and toast -- for breakfast.

"They all ate very well," he said with a chuckle. "Every day we went to the grocery store, sometimes twice."

Cesar Sanchez, a 40-year-old Mexican construction worker who spoke English and Spanish, was on his way from Topeka, Kansas, to Seattle. He said he was moved by Mann's generosity, especially for helping them at a time when there's an anti-Latino immigrant sentiment nationwide.

"Not everyone would do what he did for us," Sanchez said in a phone interview Friday. "They treated us like family."

Ron Gilder, Mann's friend who also stays with him, said it was a challenge to communicate with the guests but added it was an awesome experience.

"It was fun to make a connection with someone who you would just pass by," Gilder said.

On Christmas, Mann treated the men to a feast at Charrito's Mexican restaurant. Then, the group came back to the house for "a lot of toasts and cheers ... and *Feliz Navidad* s," Mann said.

The men were "cordial, clean, honest and respectful," and "we never worried about anything missing," Mann said. One day he awoke up to find them shoveling snow in his front yard, and they continued to ask what chores they could do around the house.

Mann, who has three grown children and married his wife, Tara Lyman, eight years ago, moved to Utah in 2003. He often volunteers, takes in people in need and hires homeless people to work on his house. He's never had anyone "burn" him.

Still, by far, Mann said this "little project" was the most expensive but made for the best Christmas he's ever had.

"This one, I won't ever forget," he said.

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Floyd Mann, right, and his friend Ron Gilder talk about how they accommodated several stranded travelers at Mann's home in West Valley on Friday, January 2, 2009. Mann took in 11 strangers that were stranded by Greyhound in Salt Lake City over the Christmas holiday. Jim Urquhart/The Salt Lake Tribune; 01/02/09



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The last 8 (of 11) stranded bus travelers---posing with Floyd & Ron on Christmas day 2008. Courtesy of Floyd Mann.