



PHOTOS BY ALLISON FRIESEN/VOICE

Left: Raul Betelli Arakaki and grandmother Maria Amelia Latorre Betelli were part of a group of Brazilian visitors travelling throughout Manitoba with Friendship Force Winnipeg last week. Their stops included several locations in the Pembina Valley, including enjoying a traditional Mennonite buffet at Triangle Oasis in Winkler (above) on Thursday.

Brazilians stop by Winkler, Morden on Manitoba tour

By Allison Friesen

Twenty-three travellers from Brazil made stops in southern Manitoba last week as part of their visit through Friendship Force Winnipeg, a travel club dedicated to promoting "friendships and understanding by bringing people together from all over the world".

Most of the visitors hail from Piracicaba, a city located in the Brazilian state of São Paulo. They spent July 4-11 being spirited around Manitoba by Friendship Force Club members.

Friendship Force is a network of 360 clubs around the world which are paired up with like-minded clubs to visit and receive visitors from.

Three clubs exist in Manitoba, including two in Winnipeg and one in Brandon.

"The whole idea of Friendship Force is we talk about faces, not places. When we go to meet various clubs, we're more interested in the people that are there as opposed to what the places are," said Friendship Force Winnipeg exchange director Joe Keenan. "Our motto now is 'it changes the way you see the world'."

On the itinerary for last week's tour

were stops at the Neuberghal National Heritage Site, the Plum Coulee Museum, the Canadian Fossil Discovery Centre in Morden, and the Triangle Oasis restaurant in Winkler for a traditional Mennonite buffet dinner.

Club president Paul Hauixbeck said the goal with visiting Friendship Force clubs is to provide them with a range of cultural experiences.

"Experiences in and around Winnipeg; we always go to the Manitoba Museum, the Legislative buildings in Winnipeg, we try to get them to the Forks, we try to provide them with some of our history."

"When we try to decide on a program to give these people we look at various areas in the province [so] we can show them what we are sort of like here in Manitoba," Keenan added. "We're trying to give them a little bit of an idea of the multicultural heritage that Manitoba has."

Nineteen-year-old Raul Betelli Arakaki was travelling with his grandmother Maria Amelia Latorre Betelli, who took him to Canada as a birthday present.

Arakaki said the trip had been fun so far and called Manitoba a nice place to visit.

"It's a good place to visit and lots to learn... it's clean, beautiful," he said. "People are very respectful here."

His grandmother added that in Brazil the traffic is heavy and noisy, making Manitoba's much fewer traffic woes a welcome experience.

A member of Friendship Force for several years, Betelli has travelled all over the world. Her stop in Manitoba was the second time she had been to Canada, having visited Toronto on her first trip.

"I love it," she said. "The people are so friendly... good education, that is good... Brazil is more stress."

Charlene Hauixbeck said hosting a family is a good way to learn about the person and their culture.

"You are immersed with them for seven nights in your home, you have breakfast with them, I did the boys' laundry yesterday. You get to know them so much better than you just see them once in a while during the program."

"Hosting from other countries is not a problem if there is not a language barrier," said Paul Hauixbeck.

"If there is a barrier it becomes a little more challenging."

The Hauixbecks were hosting Arakaki and another young grandson on the trip.

Since 2002, the couple has hosted people from Russia, Brazil several times, Japan, the United States, Northern Ireland, Australia, and Germany.

Travellers "are very open to learning about your country, about your culture, your customs, what you eat," said Charlene. "They come and have seven days to learn about your region, the food you eat."

"They're all very willing to try something, whether it be the food, or doing sporting events of some type," added Paul. "They're all willing to try any program we put in front of them."

After their week-long visit in Manitoba, the group was scheduled to travel to Milwaukee in the U.S. this week.

For more information about Friendship Force, visit www.friendship-forcewinnipeg.org

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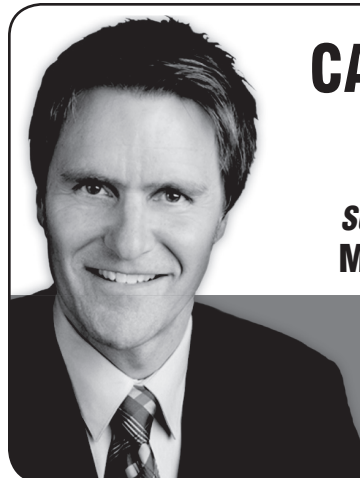
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