

Denny Terrace residents comfort bus crash victims



PHOTO BY CLAIRE MCDANIEL

Denny Terrace residents (left to right) Mary Margaret Willoughby, Donald Gardner, Cinda Lium, Ed Ward, Michael Porter and Janice Linderman pose with the certificate of appreciation presented to them by East Precinct Operations Lt. Sean O'Donnell and signed by Seattle Police Chief Gil Kerlikowske for providing the passengers from the I-5/Melrose Ave bus crash on Dec. 19, 2008 a warm place to recover. Not pictured is Mark Iverson.

BY CLAIRE MCDANIEL
Seattle Housing Authority

Images of the Northwestern Trailways bus hanging dangerously over the ledge about 20 feet above Interstate 5 in Seattle were all over the local and national news on Dec. 19.

Three buses carrying young people from the Columbia Basin Job Corps Center in Moses Lake were looking for a detour around the closed Denny Way to get to Downtown Seattle. Two of the buses decided to turn down East Thomas Street, not realizing how steep and icy it was until it was too late. As reported by The Seattle Times, "The first bus slid across Melrose Street, crashed through the guardrail over I-5 and edged out over the freeway. The second bus then struck the first

bus and pushed it further over the edge."

Afraid that the buses might go all the way over the edge onto the freeway, passengers, most in their teens and early twenties, scrambled out through the windows.

A group of residents at SHA's Denny Terrace on Melrose Avenue spontaneously decided to comfort the emotionally shaken passengers. Resident Janice Linderman offered the use of the Denny Terrace Community Room where she and Cinda Lium took the lead with the help of Mary-Margaret Willoughby, Donald Gardner, Ed Ward, Michael Porter and Mark Iverson in serving the passengers food and coffee while the medics checked for injuries and police officers interviewed and identified everyone.

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“I started knocking on doors and more people got involved — making them coffee and getting cookies,” Lium said.

“Somebody had brought the kids into the building. We got chairs for them so they could sit down. A bunch of us rounded up the usual suspects who help in these situations. We went up to our apartments and brought down tea, cocoa, cookies, crackers and listened to them talk and tell their stories,” Linderman said.

Fortunately, there were only minor physical injuries.

The passengers described the harrowing moments before they evacuated the buses and were taken to safety.

“While the kids were climbing out the windows and out the back, the bus driver was trying to back up from the ledge. They then saw the other bus driver coming right at them,” Linderman said.

“Understandably, they were pretty shaken up. We got some of them cell phones to use so they could call their moms. One mother who arrived on the scene was so appreciative. She gave me a hug,” Lium said.

Officer John Skommesa of the Seattle Police Department was so impressed with the kindness and generosity of this group of Denny Terrace residents that he sent an email to Property Manager Anna Corbett praising their efforts and expressing “heartfelt thanks” from his Acting Sergeant Sina Ebinger.