

# Students Get a Taste of Fort Lauderdale in St. George

The local Chamber of Commerce likes to call St. George "the Palm Springs of Utah," but during the college and high school spring break, it's another comparison that comes to mind.

"For our area, it's like Fort Lauderdale," says Salt Lake City architect Steve Crane. "You can't get a room there during spring break."

"No, St. George doesn't have many of the things that make Fort Lauderdale a mecca for vacationing college students every year at spring break," said an article last April in *The Event*, Salt Lake City's equivalent of Atlanta's *Creative Loafing*. "But for students in Utah, it has one distinct advantage. It is a couple of thousand miles closer than the Florida beach resort."

The annual descent on the once-sleepy Mormon community by students not only from Utah but other Western states with cold climates began with a trickle about four years ago, residents say, and has increased dramatically in the past two years. Some 10,000 students made the trip last year, up 3,000 to 4,000 from the year before. More are expected this Easter weekend.

"It's phenomenal," says Kaylene Preston, 51, who moved here from Burley, Idaho, 12 years ago. "You cannot get up and down St. George Boulevard. It is bumper to bumper all four lanes. At 10 o'clock at night, you still have kids all over the place."

As far as Mrs. Preston can tell, the kids "just have a good, clean time." But local police, who work overtime throughout the students' break, beg to differ. "We make more arrests in three days than we do in the first three months of the year," says Deputy Chief Kelly Larson. "We have a lot of alcohol problems."

For souvenirs, students snap up T-shirts proclaiming, "I survived St. George Boulevard and Bluff Street" (the town's two main drags), "St. George Beach Club Member," "St. George Sport Sailing Yacht Club" and "Sail St. George," and they do a lot of meeting and greeting. They do not drink openly on the streets, nor do they frequent local bars in massive proportions. Many don't even buy alcohol in St. George but bring their own from home. And the wildest events seem to be well-attended

keg parties on the Arizona Strip just outside of town.

"It gets rowdy," camera store owner Fred Topalian says with a chuckle. "For Utah."

Ironically, the town that appeals so much to vacationing young people from elsewhere has trouble keeping its own young at home.

"You must remember — there's not a whole lot to do here," says Dick Hammer, owner of Dick's Cafe.

Claiming that a turkey farm was at one time the largest employer, Steve Miller, 27, says, "They closed the farm, but the turkeys are still here." Mr. Miller, who moved to Utah's Dixie from Detroit 18 years ago, makes his living as a jack-of-

all-trades who does everything from framing houses to laying carpet. Recalling his shock after moving from Detroit, he says fun for young people here meant only two things: going to a bowling alley or roller skating.

For young adults starting out on careers, the area has even less to offer, he says.

After finishing Dixie High School, he traveled around and worked at other jobs, including a three-month stint as a cook in Lakeland, Fla. "But I always end up here," Mr. Miller says. "I hate it, but I don't really. This is paradise. But there ain't much work here."

— Keith Graham