



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on March 22, 2021

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The Goodness of America

Shoes for Souls

At just 12 years old, Lindsay Sobel of Los Angeles, California, made it her mission to *pair* the homeless population of her city with a *pair* of great shoes.

As part of her preparation for her bat mitzvah ceremony, Sobel launched Shoes for Souls, a charitable program that collects and distributes shoes for Southern Californians in need.

“Part of the requirement for having a bar or bat mitzvah is that in some way you give back to your community, give back to the world,” Sobel told KNX-1070 News Radio. “I decided I wanted to give back as big as I could.”

Sobel had been struck by the deplorable conditions in which the homeless population in her area lived and knew she wanted to do something to help. “I noticed a lot of them did not even have shoes on,” she said in an interview with the online site A Mighty Girl. “At 12 years old, I was like, ‘Wow, people don’t have shoes?’ It kind of put things into perspective for me.”

Today, nearly five years since its inception, Shoes for Souls has donated more than 30,000 pairs of shoes for the homeless.

Sobel says the organization accepts shoes in good condition. “My motto is, if you would wear it, I’ll accept it,” she told A Mighty Girl. “I want to try to give the best experience to all the people.... A fresh, new pair of shoes can really brighten someone’s day, brighten their attitude, and their outlook on life.”

As the pandemic affected her ability to host school shoe drives, Sobel turned to the Next Door app to solicit donations.

Restaurant-owner Rescue

Adolfo Melendez, owner of the Tex-mex eatery El Mezcal in Stevens Point, Wisconsin, knows firsthand the tremendous impact the coronavirus pandemic has had on the restaurant industry. That’s why he decided that he would use his own resources to help his competition avoid cutbacks and closures.

With money from his own restaurant’s advertising budget, Melendez purchased more than \$2,000 in gift cards to other restaurants in his community and raffled them off to customers on Facebook, WKOW-27 News reported.

CNN reported Melendez began purchasing \$20 gift cards from area restaurants at the end of last year.

Melendez told CNN he was inspired to help his fellow restaurant owners after a local realty company helped his own restaurant at the start of the pandemic.

“They did something where people voted for their favorite restaurant and I got second place so they bought \$300 in gift cards from me,” he said.

Melendez believes that helping his competition to be successful reaffirms his own place in the community and encourages residents to shop and eat local. “That’s part of what keeps us alive,” he told WKOW. “You can go to Applebee’s, or you can go to Pizza Hut but it ain’t the same like when you go to this little diner or pizza joint.”



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“Mattress Mack”

Jim “Mattress Mack” McIngvale of Houston, Texas, is well-known locally for his over-the-top commercials. But he has also built a reputation for himself as the guy who opens his furniture-store locations to families displaced by severe weather. The first time was in 2005 following Hurricane Katrina. More recently, Mattress Mack opened his Gallery Furniture locations as “warming stations” for hundreds of residents after Texas was struck by a winter storm that knocked out large parts of its power grid and left millions without power and running water.

According to the store’s website, Mattress Mack and his crew provided more than 3,000 meals and overnight accommodations to more than 700 Houston residents after offering its stores as shelters for displaced residents.

McIngvale put the word out on social media, inviting displaced residents to his store. “We have lots of beds, lots of sofas and lots of recliners,” he told them. “Come on in and make yourself at home.” The staff handed out blankets, chips, donuts, water, and sweatshirts to everyone as they arrived.

McIngvale has been doing this since 2005, when he first opened his stores to shelter people who fled Hurricane Katrina.

In 2017, he opened his stores as shelters for victims of Hurricane Harvey. “We’re opening up both buildings as shelters during this horrible time,” McIngvale said in a 2017 post on the company Facebook page. “We’ve got lots of beds, we’ve got lots of food, we got water, and you can even bring your animals.”

Mattress Mack also opened his stores in 2019 after Imelda, when he and his staff also rescued people from stranded cars and flooded homes, the *Washington Post* reported.

This time around was a bit more difficult, however, as the store was also impacted by the storm. The electricity was coming from a diesel-run generator, and the store was operating with a single functional water pipe. McIngvale also had to ensure proper COVID protocols were in place.

But, the *Washington Post* reported, Mattress Mack made due by bringing in portable toilets and rigging a special flush system in the restrooms.

McIngvale also paid vendors to bring in burgers, hot dogs, tacos, and breakfast burritos. And as if seeing to the physical needs of his guests wasn’t enough, McIngvale also wanted to take their minds off their troubles, he told Michael Strahan on *Good Morning America*. He brought in balloon artists and other entertainment to lift spirits.

Though McIngvale has paid for most of the expenses out of his own pocket, he told the *Washington Post* that he was happy to do it. “To whom much has been given, much is expected,” he told the *Post*.

Those who have benefited from McIngvale’s generosity have sung his praises. “Their generosity is incredible,” said Maurisio Garcia, who brought his wife and three children to Gallery Furniture after their mobile home lost power. “It’s been like an adventure for the kids staying here. The first night, they fell asleep on a diagonal sofa, happy and warm.”

But for Mattress Mack, this is just another opportunity to teach his 10-year-old granddaughter that the “essence of living is giving,” *People* reported.



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