

Mitzvot from the heart

our community's bar and bat mitzvah projects



Jack Schroeder

United Hebrew Congregation

Every child enjoys playing games. Especially Jack Schroeder, a student at Parkway Central Middle school.

Last December, Jack hosted a family fun night at the Haven House St. Louis for the kids and their families. Several of Jack's friends joined in on the fun, playing bingo and just visiting with the residents. "I brought lots of games I had purchased and collected so that each winner could receive a prize. I was amazed to see people that were sick (and their families) smiling and having such a good time."

Son of Lisa and John Schroeder, Jack chose Haven House for his *mitzvah* project because "the residents there are people just like you and me that want to have some fun even though they're sick. Helping cheer them up made me feel great!"

Haven House St. Louis, located in Creve Coeur, was founded with the mission to provide the comfort of home and a community of support for families traveling more than 25 miles to St. Louis to receive medical care for their children. Haven House St. Louis has earned an international reputation for service and care.

If you would like to volunteer or make a donation to the Haven House, please visit www.havenhousestl.org.

Sarina Grebler

Central Reform Congregation

Sarina Grebler has always loved dogs, so it came as no surprise when she chose the Animal Protective Association (A.P.A.) of Missouri to benefit from her *mitzvah* project.

Sarina's parents, Debbi and David Grebler, had adopted a mixed breed yellow Labrador from the St. Louis City dog pound two years before Sarina was born. Sarina and Golda became best friends, sharing both lengthy walks and numerous naps for several years.

In the fourth grade, Sarina's interest in dogs found expression through a semester-long research project, through which she explored the development, history, traits, relationship to human beings, modern use, and popularity of dozens of breeds of dogs. This in-depth study covered dog breeds from throughout the world, including some which no longer are found anywhere.

A significant theme which emerged from Sarina's study was that



over many centuries dogs were both companions and protectors of their human families. Perhaps this observation somehow led to Sarina's identification of protection as a previously unrecognized theme in *Vayeishev*, the story of Joseph and his brothers, her *bat mitzvah* Torah portion.

A member of Central Reform Congregation, Sarina had her *bat mitzvah* on Nov. 24 — Thanksgiving weekend.

Through requests to friends and family, and with a contribution from her own *bat mitzvah* gift money, Sarina raised more than \$500 for the A.P.A. She also collected food, toys, towels and bedding for the animals at the A.P.A. shelter.

Sarina is a 7th grade student at Wydown Middle School. She lives

in Clayton with her parents, her two brothers, Joshua and Joel, and Golda's successor, Ginger, a Maltese-Bichon-Poodle mix. She was adopted from the St. Charles County Humane Society.

The Animal Protective Association of Missouri is a non-profit organization dedicated to bringing people and pets together, advancing humane education and creating programs beneficial to the human/animal bond. The A.P.A. provides the following services: (1) Shelter and Care for Homeless Dogs and Cats; (2) Adoption Services; (3) Veterinary Clinic; (4) Lost and Found Assistance; (5) Education and Outreach.

For more information, or to donate, you can contact the A.P.A. via the Web site, www.apamo.org, or by phone at 314-645-4610.

Andrew Feit

Congregation B'nai Amoona

Andrew Feit loves sports. When the Solomon Schechter Day School student, and son of Amy and Denny Feit, was looking for a *mitzvah* project that reflected his interests, he looked for organizations that had something to do with athletics. Andrew and his mom found Lift For Life Gym, a year-round after-school center for inner-city kids.

"The Gym was a perfect match for Andrew," said Amy. "With his love of sports and interest in kids of all ages, Andrew really enjoyed working on his *mitzvah* project." Andrew's project involved collecting supplies and gifts for the children at the gym — balls, sports books, art supplies, DVDs and other items. Andrew incorporated these into the centerpieces that adorned the tables at his party.

In his *bar mitzvah* speech at B'nai Amoona, Andrew spoke about the importance of kids having access to sports programs that are free of charge. He feels that places like Lift for Life Gym, where kids



Andrew Feit (center) stands with new friends from Lift for Life Gym.

can go after school every day, are crucial to helping them develop sportsmanship and team work, and are important places for kids to meet friends.

Lift for Life Gym is in its 20th year as a free after-school center for children ages 8 to 18, located just north of downtown St. Louis. It is open to all children living within St. Louis city limits. More than 400 children participate in its programs each year. Along with weightlifting and basketball, the gym offers tutoring, a computer lab, organized games and free dinner served to the children. The gym receives no United Way or government funding; it is supported by donations.

A couple of weeks after

his *bar mitzvah*, Andrew and his mom drove down to Lift for Life Gym to deliver his donation, which filled a dozen baskets. While there, he spent over an hour playing basketball with a few of the boys who regularly attend the gym. When it was time for Andrew to go, Gym member Jonathan Ringo hugged Andrew and said, "You're a great basketball player. When are you coming down to play again? I want you on my team."

To make a contribution in Andrew's honor or to learn more about Lift For Life Gym, go to www.liftforlife.org or mail to the administrative office: Lift For Life Gym, 1731 S. Broadway, St. Louis, MO 63104.

Shira Diamant

United Hebrew Congregation

Shira, daughter of Judi and Mike Diamant, has a passion for reading and knows the importance of it. For her *mitzvah* project she wanted to be able to share her love of reading and hoped to help those going through hard times to be able to escape into a different world, even if it's just for a little time, through a book.

A student at Parkway Northeast Middle School, Shira set up collection boxes around her temple and also asked friends and family to support her cause.

Working with the book club, Turning Pages, Shira and its members collected over 300 books and over 50 CDs and DVDs and donated them to the A.L.I.V.E.



(Alternatives to Living In Violent Environments), organization. They, in turn, distributed everything to various residential shelters throughout St. Louis and surrounding communities.

"I was able to see how fortunate I am to have a loving family and place to always come home to. But it's not enough to feel lucky or blessed if we're not giving or sharing with others," said Shira.

A not-for-profit organization, A.L.I.V.E.'s mission is to provide accessible and affordable alter-

natives to adults and children impacted by Domestic Abuse. A.L.I.V.E. works to eradicate family violence by providing short-term emergency sanctuary, support services, and community education.

To make a donation in Shira's honor and find out more about A.L.I.V.E., please visit their Website: www.alivestl.org. For more information about the Turning Pages book club, post a note at the bottom of their Website: www.members7.board-host.com/mysti/.

Highlight your child's mitzvah project

If you would like to feature your child's *mitzvah* project, please contact Elise Krug at the *Jewish Light* by calling 314-743-3671 or by email at: ekrug@thejewishlight.com.

