

## **GOOD DEEDS THEIR REWARD COOPER CITY TEMPLE SERVES ON MITZVAH DAY**

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Helping your neighbor gives one a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment.

Over 1,000 people helping their neighbors is a powerful experience that can send chills down one's back.

That was the experience felt by many members of Cooper City's Temple Beth Emet recently as 1,300 of them signed up to do community service in the congregation's annual Family Mitzvah Day.

"Mitzvah comes from the Jewish word that means good deeds," explained Gladys Sznajderman who is the assistant director of the synagogue's religious school.

Our goal is to have a day of sharing and encouraging a sense of community as well as providing services," Sznajderman said. "We want to make a difference in the life of people."

"Our children are taught to do good deeds, heal a wound and save the world," she explained. "This event involves the whole family."

Sznajderman and her helpers worked for six months to develop 35 projects from donating blood to teaching CPR to grooming injured horses to providing gifts and entertainment for nursing home residents.

Over 1,300 individuals from the congregation's 700 member families registered to take part in the Mitzvah Day which was held on February 9. "We have people ranging from two-year old babies who will be going to service projects with their mothers to 95 year-olds who will participate," Sznajderman said.

This is the third year that this particular congregation has sponsored a Mitzvah Day. Other Jewish congregations across the country are also scheduling their own service days throughout the year.

"It's a day that we set aside to do charitable good deeds," said Mark Jeter of Cooper City. "It reminds us that we should look out for more than our family and that we are supposed to do good deeds throughout the year."

Jeter and his family spent the morning cleaning stables and feeding horses at the Florida Research Institute for Equine Nurturing, Development and safety, a non-profit ranch that cares for injured animals. Then, in the afternoon, they joined fellow members at the Memorial Manor nursing home in Pembroke Pines where they delivered flowers and gifts, served ice cream and helped residents to play bingo.

“We need to be constantly reminded to do good deeds, and besides, as we do them, we enjoy each other’s company,” Jeter said.

“I enjoy helping people throughout the year,” said Heather Oken of Weston who was also volunteering at the nursing home. “We do projects like this all year through our synagogue.”

“Look what I got,” said Ines Schoening, a resident of the home as she displayed a bouquet of flowers she had received from some of the synagogue’s youth. “It was so nice of them to come and give these to us,” she said.

Members of the congregation selected projects that interested them and participated according to their own talents. “Some of our people packaged beauty supplies for at-risk girls in detention centers,” Sznajderman said. “Others donated lengths of their own hair to an organization that provides wigs for people who have lost their own hair.

Some members went to senior citizens homes to help residents with chores, to clean their rooms and to provide a social gathering.

Other projects including visiting children at Jackson Memorial Hospital’s pediatric unit, helping out at the South Florida Siberian Husky Rescue, Inc. and assisting members of the Lighthouse for the Blind bowl.

Three bloodmobile units were at the synagogue during the morning hours to collect blood donations from many of the members.

The day brought rewards for those who participated as well as those who were helped. “I do it because it’s nice,” said Gracie Russo, a student at Cooper City High School who helped serve ice cream at the Memorial Manor home. “It makes me happy.” Russo was participating in Temple Beth Emet’s program for the first time, but said that she had helped out in a similar Mitzvah day in previous years in North Carolina.

For others, the thrill was seeing so many people come together to help others. “The idea is that if we can all come together to do a massive Mitzvah, it can encourages us to do at least one deed a day,” said Mana Oken of Weston.

“There is a powerful feeling that you can change the world by helping one another,” Oken said. “I am encouraged to see so many people all doing the same thing to help others.”

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