



CARMEN SMYTH / NEWS-PRESS

Natasha Bender, left, 11 and Talla Cummings, 10, decorate food bags for those in need, during the Day of Giving, hosted by the Congregation B'nai B'rith Sunday afternoon.

Coordinated compassion

B'nai B'rith's 'Mitzvah Day' organized multiple charitable projects in a 'Day of Giving'

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Something out of the ordinary greeted visitors to B'nai B'rith synagogue on Sunday morning, in the form of a large mobile command post for the United Blood Services, a movable feast of a blood drive on what was a highly altruistic day on this property — and beyond.

This was the elaborate and well-organized "Day of Giving," aka "Mitzvah Day," heeding the ancient Jewish edict and impulse to engage in acts of kindness and acts intended to heal or repair the world. Mitzvah Day has been a project at Congregation B'nai Brith (CBB) going back to 2005, with a break here and there.

Other evidence of charitable, compassionate and otherwise positive change-gear projects was underway on the property, including making lunch bags for the Rescue Mission, a children's project making dog treats for the DAWG canine rescue organization (an "animal mitzvah") and tubs of collected footwear for the Soles4Souls non-profit organization. Caring baskets were being created for the mobility-challenged and others, and Habitat for Humanity was building a children's play structure.

The CBB property, in short, had transformed into a beehive of mul-

multiple activities, geared towards helping and healing others.

But there was more. Apart from the on-site project aspect of Mitzvah Day, groups of volunteers were dispatched to several locations around Santa Barbara for the day. A group engaged in habitat restoration at Elings Park and a beautification project at Transition House (and on the synagogue grounds), while another group helped organize donations for the massive Planned Parenthood book sale. The Mitzvah Day Choir was traveling to perform at the Vista del Mar retirement home and Hillside House.

Franny Taran Freund co-chaired the event this year with Monica Steiner and Kimi Cohn. CBB's last such special day was in 2015, and Ms. Taran Freund commented that "I was in a meeting with my friend Monica (Steiner) and we were saying, 'What happened to Mitzvah Day? Let's do it.'"

She added, "My mom has a philosophy that if you're feeling bad or sad, do something for someone else. I was feeling sad and mad, every time I turned on the news. I needed to do something. So this is a powerful way that not only could I do good, but hundreds of people, together, could be doing good."

One of the booths at the synagogue promoted the organ-donation organization One Legacy. Vol-

unteer and former employee Lisa Marciano explained that she got involved with the company as a kidney recipient 27 years ago, with siblings who either received or donated kidneys. She commented, "I'm here to raise awareness that people should consider being a registered donor at the DMV and to talk to their families about it. If and when the time would come, which hopefully it wouldn't, at least they would have already made that decision, which makes it easier on families. One organ donor can help up to eight people, and one tissue donor can help up to 75 people. So just with that one decision, you can have a ripple effect."

The organization was represented at Mitzvah Day in the past, and Ms. Marciano was part of a contingent eager to keep a presence here. "This is a great group of people," she asserted. "Just the idea of doing mitzvahs — of doing good in the world — in this day and age is so important. We definitely wanted to be a part of this."

Taking a break from her overseeing of a basket-making project, CBB Executive Director Elizabeth Gaynes talked about the origins of Santa Barbara's own Mitzvah Day, a tradition in place in other synagogues. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina raised awareness of natural

Please see **GIVING** on A8

Volunteers of all ages help with event

■ GIVING

Continued from Page A1

disaster and public need, which, Ms. Gaynes noted, "gave us a big driver to really do it. We had 20 projects.

"The legacy has continued," she said. On this day, "all demographics

come together, from our pre-schoolers to our seniors, and they're able to work together. The last one we did was around Rabbi Steve Cohen's 10-year anniversary with the temple. So we had a big gala and then the Day of Service. It's about every two years now.

"Now, it's part of the curriculum

in the (CBB) school, to do these mitzvah — which are acts of caring — and to do them all year long. So this day is a day when all the demographics come together and can do it all at the same time, to get their hands dirty at the same time."

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