

MAZEL TOV

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Mitzvah Projects

Teen showcases creativity through mitzvah project

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THE JEWISH STATE

Foundations or corporations usually sponsor "Surprise!Supplies," which provides art kits for children with chronic or life-threatening illnesses, but teen entrepreneur Audrey Sweetwood of Bridgewater put her own stamp on the program for her bat mitzvah.

Sweetwood spent five months designing greeting cards and a full year selling them to raise \$5,000, which will sponsor an art cart allowing Englewood-based ArtWorks: The Naomi Cohen Foundation to transport the supplies at Jersey Shore University Medical Center in Neptune starting March 25.

With a large family, Sweetwood got a head start on finding customers for her 10-card gift bags that included four birthday cards, three "thinking of you" cards, and three thank you cards, but she learned the ins and outs of fundraising by going door to door in her neighborhood and, for five hours every Sunday over a three-month span, selling cards to Hebrew school parents at Temple Beth-El of Hillsborough.

"To have a 12-year-old say 'OK, I want to do this' and reach that goal is pretty impressive," Daniela

Mendelsohn, executive director of ArtWorks, said. "For me, to see someone at that age doing what she's doing and taking it very seriously really is very admirable."

Sweetwood, who celebrated her bat mitzvah last October and will turn 14 in July, found out about ArtWorks on her own through Internet research. While her peers collected things like school supplies or food for their bar and bat mitzvah projects, Sweetwood said she wanted to do something more personal.

"I've always been interested in art and I love expressing myself and being creative," Sweetwood, who attends Bridgewater Raritan Middle School, said.

"[The art cart] gives kids the chance to express their own creativity and show their art work," she said.

Besides for alleviating the stress of being in the hospital, the art supplies will help young patients deal with the boredom of waiting for hours before they are treated, Sweetwood said.

"I think it will brighten their day, just get their minds off what they are going through," she said.

Sweetwood's mother, Mindy, said the family encouraged Audrey to work on a mitzvah project that was "ongoing" and didn't provide a quick reward.



Courtesy of Mindy Sweetwood

Audrey Sweetwood stands in front of a poster that she used to sell gift bags with greeting cards at Temple Beth-El of Hillsborough. In her bat mitzvah project, Sweetwood, who designed the cards, raised \$5,000 to sponsor an art cart for pediatric patients at Jersey Shore University Medical Center.

"So many things today are instant gratification," Mindy said.

Audrey had to step outside of her comfort zone by fundraising, writing a brief to describe her project, and pitching the idea to ArtWorks, Mindy said. Since Audrey will continue to volunteer for ArtWorks and the hospital,

her bat mitzvah project is "not a project that necessarily has an end to it," Mindy said.

"A lot of important skills were learned along the way," Mindy said.

"It really just becomes part of her life, giving back," she said.

Mendelsohn said Audrey first volunteered for ArtWorks last November in the organization's "Express Yourself" art show, a twice-a-year event, once in New

Jersey and once in New York, bringing together kids from 22 hospitals. Mindy said the fact that Jersey Shore University Medical Center never had access to ArtWorks programs before was provided additional inspiration for Audrey's bat mitzvah project.

"She really thought it was quite cool to bring a new hospital into the mix," Mindy said.

Mendelsohn said she was impressed with how Audrey "hit the ground running" fundraising; Audrey acknowledged that it was a difficult task

because she "depended on everybody's generosity."

Bar and bat mitzvah years are usually "a time to be selfish" during which teens focus on receiving presents and money, Mendelsohn said, but Audrey chose to celebrate her milestone by giving.

"Her hard work is really going to put smiles on the faces of so many young kids in the hospital," Mendelsohn said.