

## Operation Noah

By: Dennis Fries

As a member of the Jewish community, I value my responsibility to give back to the society through *chesed*, *tzedakah*, and *tikkun olam*. For my bar mitzvah project, I created a program called "Operation Noah". "Operation Noah" is a stuffed animal collection drive that benefits pediatric wards at two local hospitals. I enlisted the help of local schools and merchants to set up drop locations for people to donate new stuffed animals to comfort young patients in the hospital. I have also involved the media and groups, such as a local theater, to help with the program by letting everybody know how to help out. This is a simple, yet significant, way to give support to others and make a difference.

The idea came to me after spending a good deal of time in the hospital from a variety of ailments. During one visit I was given a stuffed animal that helped comfort me and settle me down. I was then told that there was only one left. I decided to lend a hand these children undergoing painful and frightening procedures and thereby make the world a better place (*tikkun olam*) by setting up a drive to collect stuffed animals for the children that have to go through the same sorts of things that I have. From first hand experience, I have learned that a hospital can be a pretty scary place for kids. It gives me a great deal of satisfaction to know that I have eased other children's fears.

This project greatly impacted my bar mitzvah celebration. As I read the Torah portion of Noah, I could look around the sanctuary and see it filled with new donations. The collection continued at the party later that evening, where friends and family came with baskets full of new stuffed animals. Even with all of the preparation to be done, I chose to take the morning of my bar mitzvah to spend time with sick children and parents of preemies. It was a very meaningful feeling to know I was helping others on such an important weekend of my life.

Since my recent bar mitzvah in October, my program has expanded even further. Currently, I have collected over 3,500 stuffed animals, dropped them off at the hospitals, and visited patients to personally hand some out. On each stuffed animal, there is a tag that says where they can

give back to the program by dropping off stuffed animals at the designated locations. Along with keeping current updates about the program to the media and meeting with other companies to set up new drop locations, this is a great way to keep stuffed animals coming through to Operation Noah. This is very important to get more stuffed animals because the need for soothing sick children will always be there. I also believe that no child should see the closet bare without a single stuffed animal as I did. As I grow older, I will continue this project and find new ways to make the world a better place.