

Lending a Hand Across the Sea - 4/17/08

by Diana Curtis

As a Boy Scout, Southwest resident Cameron Collins has learned how to give back to the community. So, when faced with the challenge of choosing a meaningful bar mitzvah project, the 12-year-old decided to not only make a difference in the world, but in the lives of fellow Scouts.

Cameron is a member of Boy Scout Troop No. 6, which is chartered out of St. Luke's United Methodist Church at Windermere. A member since elementary school, he originally loved scouting because he got to go camping and learn new skills. However, as he grew older, he found what he really enjoyed was giving back to the community.

When it was time to begin the bar mitzvah project, Cameron and his father, Brian, contacted a group in New York called Friends of Israel Scouts Inc., an organization that works toward developing and maintaining relationships between Israeli and American youths. Cameron explained that he wanted to give back to Scouts in Israel, so the organization contacted several troops, or rechasims as they are called in Israel. One particular troop, Shevet Rechasim, was eager to volunteer to work with Cameron.



As part of a bar mitzvah project, Southwest resident Cameron Collins contributes to the scouting community in Israel.

With a limited amount of time to complete his project, Cameron contacted the Israeli troop and began working on its "wish list." Items the Scouts needed included tents, kayaks, a computer, sailing boat, camping mattresses, paint, folding table and more.

First, Cameron asked local companies for donations. The greatest ally he has had in this endeavor is Bass Pro Shops at Festival Bay Mall. Manager Greg Finenco graciously donated three of the six tents Cameron needed.

"I still need three more tents and am also trying to get some kayaks donated," Cameron said. "I have sent some e-mails to some companies, but have not heard anything back yet. If anyone out there can donate or purchase some of these items for me — or anything else — let me know," he said.

Cameron celebrated his bar mitzvah earlier this month, but the second stage of his project is still ongoing. He is holding a raffle to raise money to purchase the remaining items on the troop's list. Raffle prizes include gift certificates to Seasons 52, The Melting Pot and Fulton's Crab House.

"I am selling tickets until April 22, and the raffle will be at my Boy Scout meeting on Tuesday, April 29," Cameron said. "The rest of my troop has been really supportive, too. They are actually helping me sell the raffle tickets, so it's neat for us, as an American Scout troop, to be helping a group of Scouts in Israel."



Shevet Rechasim members meet Israeli President Shimon Peres (fourth from left).

The Israeli troop is equally as excited to be working with Cameron and his fellow Scouts.

"The most important part of Cameron's project is that his donations will change the Shevet for the better," said a representative from Shevet Rechasim. "For example, the contributions will better our overnight Passover or summer trips, and we will sufficiently use every item in our troop."

After Cameron purchases the remaining items and collects the last of the donations, his next big feat will be to transport the numerous items to the troop in Israel. Fortunately, Cameron and his family are making a trip to Israel in June and will be able to bring many of the donated items with them. However, some things may still need to be shipped, which will be an additional financial cost. And others, such as the computer, will be purchased from a store overseas.

"The computer is actually being purchased at an Office Depot in Israel since they have different electricity and software issues," Cameron said.

"My dad has helped me make arrangements with the store over there to buy the computer at a discounted price. We'll then send the store the money and either pickup the computer when we get over there to deliver it ourselves, or make arrangements for one of the scout leaders from Shevet Rechasim to go get it."

Cameron's family and friends have been incredibly impressed with his hard work and dedication.

"It is really a community effort, and largely the Southwest Orlando community, to help make this happen ... I think it's pretty unique, and, for a 12-year-old, pretty impressive," Brian said.

However, Cameron admitted that he was a little apprehensive about undertaking such a large project.

"At first, I was worried that I wouldn't be able to get anything donated but, as time went by, that all changed.

"The whole thing has been amazing. But I have to say, the best part will be giving the troop in Israel the items myself."