

Jewish Press of Pinellas County **20th Annual Bar & Bat Mitzvah Planning Guide** & Jewish Press of Tampa



Name virtually any sport and there was a cake to match.

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Following the salad course, there was an ESPN “ESPY” style awards ceremony. Guests were called up and honored for their contributions to, and participation in, Jacob’s life. MVP plaques were presented to Jacob’s parents, while his sister Leah received a “Drama Queen” award. A nephew who plays hockey received a trophy with a hockey player on it and an uncle who is a long-distance bicyclist received a Tour de France-style award.

There were close to 90 kids at the event. Some received individual awards, but every one of them received all-star or superstar medals, with Jacob’s name and the date of the Bar Mitzvah on the back.

The children also received T-shirts, ordered specifically to their size. The shirts had sports ball images on the front and the words “I was a good sport at Jacob’s Bar Mitzvah” on the back. Another personal touch – they were all given candy in wrappers that said “Hope you had a sweet time at Jacob’s Bar Mitzvah.”

Following the awards ceremony and a video presentation, dinner was served. Then it was time to dance and socialize.

The weekend events began Friday night with family members posing for photos, then a sit-down Shabbat dinner at Temple Beth-El, catered by a local restaurant, for about 80 guests – family, out-of-town guests and close friends. This was followed by a Shabbat eve service, then an oneg.

Both sets of Jacob’s grandparents — Lora and Allan Alexander, and Amy and Bruce Epstein, all of Pinellas Park, — hosted the Saturday kiddush luncheon following the Shabbat morning service. Then there was a few hours rest until the party and dinner that evening – attended by about 230 guests.

On Sunday, the Alexanders held a brunch for out-of-town guests and close friends, presenting them with gift bags as thanks for their attendance. Because it was also Mother’s Day, flowers and a cake for all the moms were included.



ily heritage as well as the longtime involvement of his mother’s family with the Florida Holocaust Museum by donating his Bar Mitzvah “gelt” to a needy local Russian family whose grandmother is a Holocaust survivor.

Through Gulf Coast Jewish Family Services — the very agency that helped Jacob’s dad and his parents emigrate here from Russia 33 years ago – the Alexanders were put in touch with the Russian immigrant family in St. Petersburg.

The two families had lunch together and Jacob’s dad, Vladimir Alexander, translated as they talked.

“We got to eat Russian food. My husband loved it,” Jenny Alexander said.

Jacob poses by the ticket booth. Guests received tickets to various sports events directing them to corresponding tables.

‘Post game’ analysis

Jenny Alexander says they spent about \$50,000 on the event and she would not change a thing if she had to do it all over. She said it could actually have cost more had she not worked hard to collect items for the centerpieces and awards presentation and had not had help from friends and family.

Though she spent a lot of time on the decorations and invitation details, she said it was important to get the key decisions – party venue, DJ, photographer, caterer – made well in advance of the Bar Mitzvah.

She acknowledged that those on a tighter budget could eliminate some of the events and many of the details that she included in planning Jacob’s celebration. But she said the important thing is to keep in mind that the focus of the event is the child, and to make sure the plans are made for what he or she wants, not what the adults might enjoy.

As for the religious aspects of the Bar Mitzvah, she said Jacob began his studies early and was fully prepared well before the event. That was fortunate, she said, because in the weeks leading up to the Bar Mitzvah, he had a very busy sports and academic schedule. In fact, he competed in a state history fair in Tallahassee, finishing second, on the day before the Bar Mitzvah, flying back hours before the Friday evening service and dinner.

For his mitzvah project, Jacob decided to honor his father’s fam-

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