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Michael and Gail Fry had a family medallion/charm custom-designed for three generations of family members.

### ATTENTION SOON-TO-BE BAR/BAT MITZVAH CANDIDATES

This one's for you!

By TODD SHOTZ  
 Special to the Jewish Press

So you want to have a Bar or Bat Mitzvah ... good. Here are a few tips on how to make it through the year leading up to the big day.

#### Managing parental stress

First, your parents will inevitably go crazy. Slowly, over time, you'll see the telltale signs. It is important to detect the early-onset symptoms of a parent's mounting stress: Are they unusually quiet at the dinner table? Do they sit in a corner making endless lists, humming "Sunrise, Sunset"?

By the time they start nudging you daily about practicing, it is important to sit them down and pop in an old Betamax of their own embarrassing disco-era Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Watch their service, look over their geeky photos and be sure to ridicule them as much as possible — it takes the edge off for you and reminds them how much work you are putting in.

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### Homemade tallit creates new family tradition for the Bar Mitzvah

By DIANA GERSHMAN  
 Jewish Press

The gift of a tallit from parents to their Bar or Bat Mitzvah is a longstanding Jewish tradition. Less frequently, the tallit has been handmade by a parent.

Andrew Benson, son of Roberta Baer and Andre Benson, was presented with his tallit — handmade by his mother and younger brother Billy — before he read from the Torah at his Bar Mitzvah at Congregation Schaarai Zedek in Tampa in January.

"Homemade (tallitot) are more unique than you would get at the store. [My mom and I] were looking at other people who had their tallits made by their moms, and I liked it," said Andrew.

Baer and Billy made the prayer shawl over the course of last summer when their schedules were less hectic.

"Originally, (tallitot) were made of wool," she said, but today can be made of almost anything." Due to Florida's hot climate, Andrew's mother said she opted for cotton.

"Making a tallit isn't just a matter of sewing. It's harder to do than you would think," she said, "and I do quilting."

Baer said the most difficult part about making the tallit for her was matching things up perfectly. "The real trick of a tallit is you have to match things up perfectly. And you can't have any seams showing ... and you don't want it to be top heavy."

Plus there are religious requirements and traditions involved. For instance, attached to the shawl's four corners are fringe called tzitzit, which are traditionally knotted 613 times in honor of the Torah's 613



Andrew Benson wearing the tallit, his mother — with the help of his younger brother — hand made.

commandments. She asked Rabbi Joel Simon at her synagogue to show her how to tie the tzitzit knots. The threads for the tzitzit must be equal in length, and if more than one thread is missing or broken, the tallit is no longer kosher for usage.

There are no specific patterns or colors required for a tallit. The body of Andrew's tallit was white, and though he selected the colors, yellow, orange, and red "and no flowers," for its embellishment, he did not play a role in its actual making.

And, he made sure he did not see it until it was presented to him at his Bar Mitzvah.

"I was amazed," Andrew said indicating he would like to pass down the tallit to his own children.

### Tallit Tidbits

"Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them throughout their generations fringes in the corners of their garments... that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them; and that ye go not about after your own eyes..." Numbers 15:37-41

Because this biblical commandment on which the tallit is based requires that the fringes be seen, the

garment is generally worn only during the day. An exception is Yom Kippur eve, when, because of the greatness of the holiday, the tallit is donned before sunset.

The knots and strands of the fringes, called tzitzit, make up the number 613, the total number of commandments found in the Torah.

Available in a wide array of fabrics ranging from wool to silk to synthetics, there is a biblical prohibition from mingling wool and linen. All tallit have an atarah (neckband crown) sewn on the top. Often, the atarah contains the blessing one is required to recite before putting on the tallit.

Besides the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, the tallit is associated with ceremonial rituals in birth, marriage and death.

For some girls, their first introduction to the tallit may be at their baby naming, when in welcoming her into covenant, the parents wrap their daughter in a special tallit made for the occasion.

During a marriage ceremony the tallit is sometimes used as a chuppah symbolizing the future home the couple is creating by their union.

Depending upon one's affiliation, when a person dies, their tallit can either be passed on to the next generation or buried with the deceased. When a tallit is buried with the deceased, the atarah is removed and one of the fringes is cut off, rendering the tallit invalid and signifying that the legal obligations associated with it are no longer required of the deceased.

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