The greater Jewish community is essential to the KGP's success. Generous donors have helped fund and fill the goodie bags and have created the handwritten notes. Prior to each delivery, Maddie and Max reach out to the local community through videos posted on social media that include important information like deadlines and needed items. They also share a link to a Google form, where those interested in participating can sign up and make a donation of $5 or more.

That same Google form is used to collect the personal messages from pen pals in the community, which the twins transcribe into cards that are added to the gift bags they purchased with the donations."Seeing the pictures that Sharon sends us of the residents receiving their gifts has been the greatest reward," says Max.

Hoping to spread more light and joy to the residents, the teens planned on two more rounds of their Kinneret Gift Project, one for Valentine's Day and one for Passover. After that, the twins will be preparing for graduation and college, so they are hoping someone else will take over the initiative.

Coordinating the project has brought a lot of joy, though they admit working so closely together has caused a few friendly sibling squabbles. But it has provided a way for them to make a difference together – they are self-described built-in best friends – during a difficult time. And, they have some advice to offer other teens who have similar aspirations of providing help and hope.

"Find something that inspires you, and passion and joy will come naturally," Maddie says.

"When you see a problem that irks you," adds Max, "it becomes clear how to go about finding a solution."



The twins will distribute their gift bags again for Passover.

For more information or to get involved in the Kinneret project email Maddieweiss@gmail.com

A Site For Sore Eyes



This teenage Web developer is keeping the community informed and engaged during the pandemic

Frustrated with too many of his peers' *I don't care* mentality about COVID-19, local teen Gabriel Steinberg turned disappointment into inspiration. He created the COVID9Teen Connection website to inform his friends and fellow teens about the pandemic without bias or hysteria.

Gabriel, a senior at Trinity Preparatory School, took matters into his own hands with the launch of his information-based site in August 2020.

"I found that most teens were not keeping up-to-date or educated about the developments in COVID-19 news, which I feel is the spark for ignorance and disregard for others," says Gabriel. "The ultimate goal of the website is to help people stay safe and offer everything-COVID-19 in one place."

That includes providing Gabriel's fellow high-school seniors with help navigating the college-admissions process during a global pandemic. Through his website, Gabriel aims to provide information and tips on how to address common application essay questions as well as other challenges associated with applying for college during such unprecedented times. There's even guidance about COVID-safe volunteer opportunities so teens can earn community service hours required for many scholarships.

"Colleges always look for community service," says Gabriel. "I was sure to create a virtual service page with monthly projects that are easy to execute from home. I, myself, wrote dozens of personalized letters for elder-care facilities across the nation."

As a graduate of Jewish Academy of Orlando and an active member of the local Jewish community, Gabriel believes the idea of tikkun olam has influenced him in developing his website.

"A large aspect of tikkun olam is education, which is the foundation of my website," Gabriel says.

Aside from college-application assistance, Gabriel's website includes a variety of other ways for teens to become and stay educated about the virus. He has incorporated tracking maps, scientific information, news videos, testing locations,

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A Note from the Author

It has been an honor writing for *J Life* magazine and sharing the stories of so many wonderful community members, but no story has made me prouder than this one.

When I was a teacher at Jewish Academy of Orlando, I was fortunate enough to have three of the remarkable teens featured here – Maddie, Max, and Gabriel – in my fourth-grade class, and I have known the Gluck sisters and their family for many years, too. They were all amazing students, but more importantly, they have blossomed into incredible human beings. Telling the tales of their activism and empathy was a great joy of mine... I hope they give me a good grade on their stories!

– Dori Gerber



Gabriel Steinberg, the young developer behind Covid9TeenConnection.com

> "The greatest reward about this project is that I am providing a resource for the community while also learning a lot about the virus and its impact."
>
> – Gabriel Steinberg

and blog posts about his and his peers' experiences living through the COVID-19 era. One such blog post features his friend writing about Asian-American discrimination during the outbreak.

Even though the site is geared towards teenagers, Gabriel feels everyone can benefit from more knowledge. He is currently working on a new page for the site called *At Home Activities* that will provide ideas for all age groups to stay at home but have fun while doing so. He is also working on a project to install virtual photo frames in assisted-living facilities. The idea is that family members and friends can upload pictures that will automatically appear in the frame providing a contactless way for the residents to *see* their loved ones.

"The greatest reward about this project is that I am providing a resource for the community while also learning a lot about the virus and its impact," Gabriel says.

To spread the word about his website, Gabriel utilizes several social-media platforms to share breaking news and updates. His mom also shares the website on her Facebook page so that adults can access the information, as well, and hopefully share it with the teens in their lives.

Gabriel has plans to grow the site through more teen involvement and to create new partnerships that can give it greater exposure. His hope is that, as he heads off to college in the fall, he can leave the site in the hands of another student at Trinity Prep who will be tasked with developing it further and keeping it up to date.

Gabriel also has words of encouragement for other teens who want to make a difference like he has.

"If you're not interested at all in your project and the message behind it, you won't have a personal reason to start," Gabriel says. "Choose something you are passionate about and find a way to make it fun. I personally love to design things and read current events, so the website creation was enjoyable for me."

To visit Gabriel's website, go to *Covid9TeenConnection.com*