

GLENVIEW Herald

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Time to assemble

Seventh year on the Jewish calendar brings hakhel and Hanukkah together

BY DAVE OBERHELMAN

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In biblical times, the rabbi explained, every seventh year on the Jewish calendar was a year of assembly — hakhel.

"In the olden days, all the Jewish people — men, women, infants — would come to Jerusalem to the Holy Temple for a big assembly," said Rabbi Meir Moscowitz, who heads the Chabad of Northbrook.

"This year is that seventh year,"

he added.

In the year 5783 on the Jewish calendar, the Chabad seeks to represent the spirit, if not the vast multitudes, of the ancient hakhel custom.

"We are celebrating the year by encouraging gatherings, coming together and inspiring each other," Moscowitz said. "This is always a special deal, and I think this year, as we come out of the pandemic, it's more meaningful and important to find opportunities to come

together."

Pairing the community spirit of hakhel with Hanukkah activities, Moscowitz and Chabad of Northbrook have planned several activities with particular appeal to children.

That includes the Sunday, Dec. 11, menorah workshop the synagogue is presenting at Home Depot, 655 Lake-Cook Road in Deerfield, in conjunction with Chabad of

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JOE LEWNARD/jlewnard@dailyherald.com

Rabbi Meir Moscowitz lights the Menorah at Chabad of Northbrook. Every seventh year on the Jewish calendar is a year of assembly — hakhel. An apt custom for coming out of a pandemic, Moscowitz said.



COURTESY OF THE GRACE NETWORK

Volunteers Chloe Edgeworth and 3-year-old Ruth Rediehs pack hats and gloves at The Grace Network's "Winter Refill Pack Event" last weekend in Glenview.

The Grace Network provides basics so students in need may flourish

BY DAVE OBERHELMAN

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It was only Monday and already Sarah Airola was bushed.

She'd spent the weekend coordinating, organizing and helping pack more than 50 boxes of winter clothing and hygiene products at her Glenview home to donate to Chicago schoolchildren.

"I'm exhausted," she said.

She and her husband, Ryan Airola, are the founders and respectively the president and vice president of The Grace Network. It's a new, all-volunteer nonprofit that collects and donates these items for schools to distribute to underprivileged students when they need them, often due to unstable home situations.

The Dec. 3-4 "Winter Refill Pack Event" was the nonprofit's

second such drive, following a back-to-school collection this summer. The winter haul consisted of hats, gloves, socks, underwear, and dental and personal hygiene products.

Next spring, after receiving a restocking report from affiliated schools, organizers will do it again. The goal is three annual

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COURTESY OF KOHL CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

Visitors to Kohlights stop at the Shadow Play Snowbank, which allows for experimenting with lights to make colorful shadows. Kohl Children's Museum is hosting Kohlights through Dec. 29 at 2100 Patriot Blvd., Glenview. The event offers outdoor, interactive, hands-on exhibits for children.

Kohlights outdoor display lets kids explore, learn, play

Submitted by Kohl Children's Museum

Hop on board the Kohl Express with your kids this holiday season and explore Kohlights, the area's only interactive light display designed for kids.

"It's so endearing seeing the kids interact with and learn from the lights. We don't have signs up showing where the interactivity is hidden, but kids explore everything," said Mike Delfini, Kohl Children's Museum president and CEO.

"Parents tend to walk right by, but the kids see it, and when they interact, things might change color or shape and then the parents say, 'How did you do that?' It's magical!"

Kohl Children's Museum, 2100 Patriot Blvd., in Glenview, offers outdoor, interactive, hands-on exhibits year-round for children ages 8 and younger, but all ages are welcome to discover the fun at Kohlights, open through Dec. 29.

In one form or another the museum has been offering a holiday light show for children for the past 10 years. Delfini said its current, interactive iteration came about during the COVID-19 pandemic when the museum was closed to the public and couldn't gather indoors.

All Kohl exhibits and programs are aligned to the Illinois State Learning Standards and are designed to nurture a love of learning in young children.

"Kohlights is not a passive experience. You will not be sitting in a car

looking out a window. If parents are looking for a fun, learning event for kids that, by the way, will tire them out before they go to bed, this is the perfect holiday light event," Delfini said.

Kohlights exhibits include the Kohl Express and the Twinkle Train, which give guests an immersive train ride traveling through a tunnel of light.

Other interactive displays include Lollipop Light Lane, with giant lollipop lights that, when pressed, change colors along the path; Festive Firs, a winter discothèque where kids chase after dancing lights; the Field of Beams that provides a 360-degree view of thousands of lights in waves and shapes across Habitat Park field; Rainbow Arbor, with cranks that turn and change lights on the giant tree in the park's courtyard; a Prism Promenade that lets kids walk along a rainbow path of lights that show the color spectrum; and the Shadow Play Snowbank, which allows for experimenting with lights to make colorful shadows because, at Kohlights, not all shadows are black.

"We love all the creative and beautiful light displays in the Chicago area, but we're especially proud of ours because Kohlights is more like a magical toy land that children play with, rather than something they're just looking at," Delfini said.

For information and tickets, visit www.kohlchildrensmuseum.org/special-events/kohlights.

Correction

A Nov. 23 article in The Herald listed an incorrect date for the North Suburban YMCA Holiday Giveback

Drive and Blessing Bags packing event. Volunteers will be packing donated items into Blessing Bags for those experiencing homelessness from noon to 1 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 10.

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distributions. Eighty percent of those summer items got passed out within two months of receiving them.

Several factors influenced the origins of the nonprofit, which since its first board meeting as a 501(c)(3) on March 2 has partnered with more than 30 schools and helped 1,500 students facing housing instability. The main point is "trying to create social equity and diversity in the world," Airola said.

She has volunteered in the Chicago Public Schools, and is the board secretary for Erie Elementary Charter School in Humboldt Park. The Grace Network works mostly with CPS or charter schools such as the Noble charter network.

Being a volunteer in schools still reeling from COVID-19, Airola knew of teachers paying for toothbrushes, body wipes, socks and the like for students who needed them. She said many of the students served by her nonprofit are in temporary living situations. Others are in families suffering hardships such as fire, sickness, job loss or eviction.

Lacking basic necessities, the Airolas feel, is not conducive to academic growth.

The couple has children attending Pleasant Ridge Elementary and Springman Middle schools, and Sarah Airola is on Springman's committee of the Debra Gelfand Children's Foundation, which helps Glenview District 34 families in need.

"If we can do this in Glenview, why couldn't we replicate this on a broader basis?" Sarah Airola said. "We need to start supporting kids way earlier than we think if we want them to stay in the school system and feel they're supported."

The couple saw it as an opportunity to help on a basic level the students facing adversity. That's something Sarah Airola said she would never dream of,



COURTESY OF THE GRACE NETWORK

The Grace Network founder and President Sarah Airola, center, and junior board members, from left, Chloe Edgeworth, Ryan Sexton, Ben Sexton, Adyson Clemen, and Cece Gordon.

living with her three kids in the affluent suburb of Glenview.

On a personal note, Airola idolized her grandmother, Grace, who "typified what we wanted to do," she said.

In addition to those who've volunteered or donated supplies or funds to purchase them, other people have helped in different ways.

A local company donated clothes and washer and dryer sets to five different schools. A Boy Scout troop gathered 250 items. Glenbrook South High School's Titans Helping Titans group donated prom dresses and suits to 10 different high schools.

The Airolas formed a junior board of high school students to help support the nonprofit, whose growth may lead to renting warehouse space. There is a waitlist of schools wishing to partner with the group, but not yet funding to support them.

Since it is inevitably about education, the nonprofit also has been instructive in another way: exemplifying compassion.

"I really find it important to teach lessons to our kids that, hey, don't take this for granted and, more importantly, don't judge someone from another background, because you have no idea what they're up against," Sarah Airola said.

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