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Area family honors Mitzvah Day tradition together

BY SARA CALLENDER • O&E STAFF WRITER • DECEMBER 25, 2008

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Marc Betman spent last Christmas playing bingo and chatting with a group of senior citizens he had never met.

ADVERTISEMENT This year, he plans to sort food that will be distributed to pantries by Gleaners Community Food Bank.

"It's some of the most fulfilling work I've ever done," said Betman, a West Bloomfield resident. "My family has found a new Christmas tradition."

Marc and nine other family members - all of whom live in West Bloomfield - will once again volunteer for Mitzvah Day on Dec. 25. The annual charity event is organized by the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit and the Jewish Community Relations Council.

Volunteers help out at various charities so their Christian neighbors can celebrate Christmas at home.

Along with Marc, the Betman volunteers are his wife, Diane, and daughter Michelle, 13; parents Bernice and Maurice; brother Jeff and brother Michael and his wife, Lisa and their sons Noah, 13 and Seth, 10.

"It's nice to do it as a family," Bernice said. "We look forward to it."

This year on Mitzvah Day - which falls on the third day of Hanukkah - about 900 people are expected to volunteer at 40 social service agencies throughout metro Detroit. The volunteers will, for example, dish out meals at the Capuchin Soup Kitchen, deliver toys to the Methodist Children's Home and play games with senior citizens at the Fleischman Residence in West Bloomfield.

"We always get a great response from people who want to give back," said Beverly Phillips, public relations coordinator for the Jewish Community Relations Council, which co-sponsors the event. "This is a nice way to



The Betman goods at Gle Betman volu Diane, Marc, right) Michell Photographe

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build bridges with ... Christians especially because this area is so diverse."

Marc recruited Jeff to participate in Mitzvah Day three years ago when the rest of his family was in Florida. The two volunteered at Vista Maria, a group home for girls in Dearborn.

Then, last year, other members of the family jumped on board. The group spent that Christmas at the Fountains of Franklin senior citizen center.

"When you see how happy they become, just by talking to them, it feels great," said Seth, a student at Ealy Elementary School. "I really had a good time. When I was leaving, I was sad. I didn't want to go."

The Betmans spread the holiday spirit of giving throughout the whole year. Various members have planted flowers for the Jewish Association for Residential Care and helped the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit with its fall cleanup program.

The Betmans have also volunteered with the Friendship Circle in West Bloomfield, the Make-A-Wish Foundation and the Miracle League. Michael even remembers delivering dinners as a kid with his mom, Bernice, who was very involved with Meals on Wheels.

"A big part of Judaism is taking care of the community and others," Diane said. "We've been very lucky to have such great role models, in Bernice and Maurice. They really know what it is to give back."



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