

Beth El Cares helps children with Locks of Love

BY SHERRY SHAMEER COHEN

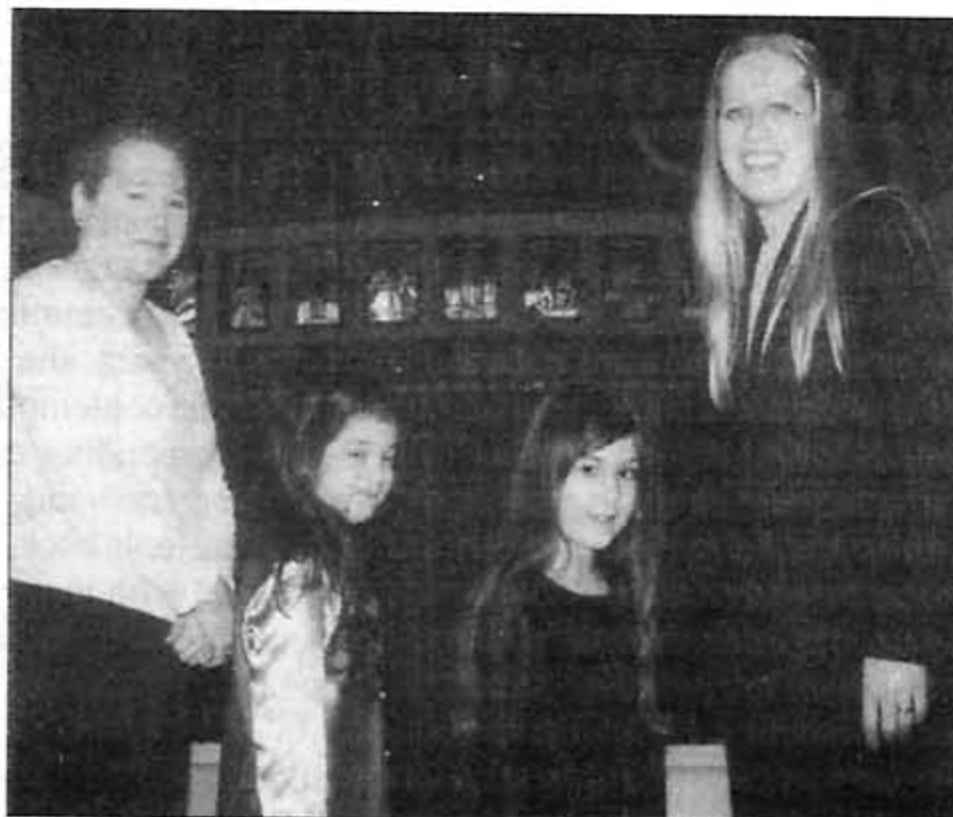
Beth El Cares, the social action arm of Temple Beth El, kicked off a mitzvah project for Locks of Love, a Florida-based organization that provides wigs for financially disadvantaged children who lost their hair to medical conditions.

Sue Greenwald, who co-chairs Beth El Cares, initiated the idea after visiting a friend who donated her hair to the organization twice. She thought, "Why couldn't we do this here?" and immediately took action. She contacted Rabbi Joshua J. Hammerman to find out if there was any *halachic* reason why it could not be done through the synagogue. When he gave the green light, support for the project grew rapidly. Rabbi Selilah Kalev, education director of the Religious School, was the first to volunteer to get her hair cut. Temple Beth El's Sisterhood helped publicize the event with mailings and oral announcements at the end of Shabbat services.

The hair cutting took place on the *bima* as the entire religious school watched. Hammerman noted that the previous day's Torah portion focused on making sacrifices and praised the volunteers for giving up some of their hair to help children with hair loss. He briefly recalled the story of Samson and Delilah, but added that the real lesson to be learned came from Maimonides' ladder of *zedakah* that ranks highly anonymous deeds that help the needy without causing any embarrassment. The donors and recipients will remain anonymous to each other and the deed helps children fit in at school and play without evoking pity.

Cheryl Wolf, Beth El Cares' other co-chair, explained that there are approximately two million children in the United States who have lost their hair to cancer treatments, burns to the scalp and other medical conditions. Most wigs that are available in stores are too big for children's heads and are not age-appropriate in style. In addition, they require glues and tapes which often irritate the scalp. The wigs provided through Locks of Love are custom-made for children and vacuum-fitted so that children are able to swim, shower and play sports without worrying that the wig may come off.

It takes a minimum of six volunteers to donate hair for just one wig. The hair must be a minimum of 10" long from the nape of the neck, and not grey or dyed. Each wig is individually cut and styled for the recipient. Wolf added that these wigs help children regain their self-esteem and



L-r: Wendy Durica, Jenna Plotzky, Hannah Katz and Rabbi Selilah Kalev before their haircuts.

asked the students to think about donating their hair now or making the commitment to grow their hair for this cause. Six girls signed up for it that day and their participation is pending parental approval.

Guy Sasson, a member of Temple Beth El and co-owner of the 26-year-old salon that bears his name, volunteered for the event. He and his partner, Barry Silverman, and staff member Christine Simonelli measured the hair of Kalev, religious school parent Wendy Durica, first-grader Hannah Katz and second-grader Jenna Plotzky. They put them into pony tails with rubber bands at the bottom and just below the line where they would cut it. As Sasson started to prepare Kalev's hair, Temple Beth El staff member Nurit Avigdor played the guitar and led the students in traditional Israeli songs. Kalev sang along and clapped her hands as Sasson cut her hair. When Sasson raised the pony tail of 16" long hair, everyone cheered. When the others got their hair cut, Kalev quipped, "Now we all have the same haircut." Sasson and his staff then misted their hair with water and gave them individual hair styles. Durica noted that in retrospect it was easier to make the decision to cut it then instead of committing to let it grow.

Prospective volunteers should contact Beth El Cares at 329-1662 or 968-6361.



L-r: Wendy Durica, Jenna Plotzky, Hannah Katz and Rabbi Selilah Kalev after their haircuts.

Purim at WFHA



Learning followed by levity: Purim at Westchester/Fairfield Hebrew Academy (WFHA). Amy Erani, director of Judaic studies at WFHA, lauded Hillary Weinberger, of Stamford, grade six, for participating in the megillah reading for her bat mitzvah. The staff and all students of WFHA wore costumes in honor of Purim. WFHA is a community day school. For further information about the school, visit www.wfha.org or call 863-9663.