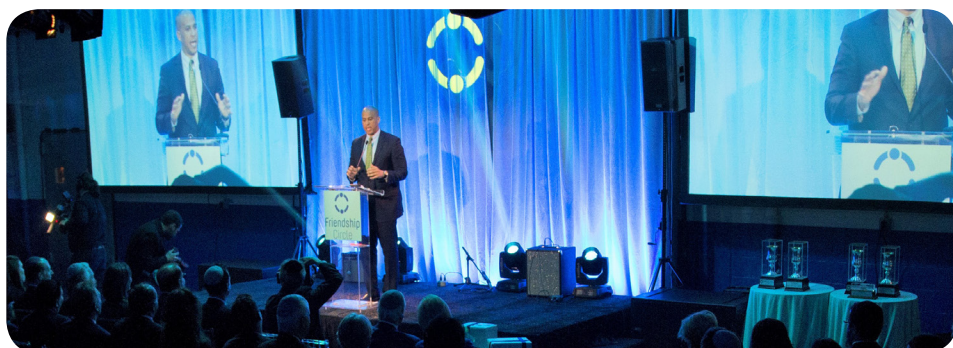




The CIRCLE

SUMMER 2015 / 5775

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Friendship Circle Banquet Offers Glimpse of the Future

Every year, hundreds of families look to the Friendship Circle for support, programming and respite. They come because they know the Friendship Circle will welcome them and provide a loving, warm atmosphere in which their child will thrive.

As Senator Cory Booker (D-N.J.) said, "You see the truth, the dignity and the worth of every child. That every child should be celebrated and elevated because you see someone created in G-d's image. To me, that is miraculous."

The Friendship Circle, he continued, "is a light to this nation of what we should do for every child. What Friendship Circle is pulling together with LifeTown is carrying out this rich tradition of elevating life, of celebrating it, of leaving no child behind. *Yasher koach*, continued strength, in what you are doing."

The senator made his remarks at the Friendship Circle Annual Banquet, which was held on March 29. More than 750 people gathered this year to show their support for families who have children and teens with special needs and to celebrate the honorees at the Friendship Circle

Annual Banquet.

The event was held at the future home of LifeTown in Livingston. A one-of-a-kind, fully accessible and integrated center, LifeTown will provide social, recreational and educational programming for the community at large and people with special needs.

The evening's honorees included Senator Booker; President and CEO of Investors Bank Kevin Cummings and his wife, Patricia; President of Rotwein+Blake Lance Blake and his wife, Ilene; Partner at Gordon and Gordon Attorneys at Law Michael Gordon and his wife, Arlene; President of Consolidated Service Distributors Steven and Mara Simon.

For those in attendance, the evening offered the most comprehensive glimpse at what the future will hold once LifeTown is completed.

Through inspiring videos and speeches, the stage was set for how LifeTown will be utilized by the community at large thanks to a myriad of after-school programs, volunteer opportunities and classes.

Adding to the understanding of what

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UPCOMING COMMUNITY EVENTS

PARENTS BARBECUE

Wednesday, July 29

Meet other Friendship Circle parents for an evening out with friends. Enjoy delicious food and learn about all the upcoming programs from Friendship Circle.

ALLIE'S SUMMER CAMP

Sunday-Thursdays

August 23-27

Volunteer to make summer camp an experience kids and teens won't soon forget, and build lasting friendships in the process. Opportunities are open to kids in grades 8-12, college students and adults. To learn more, call 973-251-0200.

TORAH CIRCLE/HEBREW SCHOOL

Sunday, September 20

Our popular Sunday morning programs return for the year on Sept. 20. However you choose to participate, your Sundays will become incredibly more meaningful when you volunteer your time.

FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE ANNUAL WALK

Sunday, October 25

It's a family fun day with a twist! Come out to support Friendship Circle families and enjoy great entertainment for the whole family. Pony rides, carnival games, bounce houses, face painting and more are on tap for the afternoon. The day kicks off with the annual FC Walk. It's the must-do event of the year!

MIAMI MARATHON

Sunday, January 24, 2016

Runners, put your passion to good use and join "Team Friendship FCNJ" at the Miami LifeTime Marathon. You'll help raise money for an incredible cause while running a premier race. Learn more at www.Miami.teamfriendship.org.

Healthcare Foundation Dedicates Sensory Park



The Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey is awarding a \$500,000 grant to the "LifeTown" capital campaign to build a fully accessible, indoor sensory park and playground that will be utilized by children of all ages and abilities.

The 47,000-square-foot LifeTown will be home to Friendship Circle, which provides programming for children and teens with special needs and their families. LifeTown will also offer social,

recreational, therapeutic and educational programs to the community at large.

"The Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey is keenly aware of the difficulties facing families with special-needs children and is thrilled to play a role in making LifeTown a reality in our community," said Marsha Atkind, Executive Director of the Foundation.

"The sensory playground funded by HFNJ will help to enrich the lives and facilitate the development of special-needs

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Ilene and Lance Blake



Senator Cory Booker

Banquet *(continued from page 1)*

the building will truly be like was the "LifeTown Virtual Tour," in which people donned a Samsung Gear VR headset and proceeded to "wander" around LifeTown using the latest in virtual reality technology.

"These kids are really special and their parents are special," said banquet attendee Sylvia Stark. "LifeTown is so needed in our community and will reach the entire community and provide something for everyone."

Stephen Fauer was also touched not just by what he saw throughout the evening, but by the potential LifeTown will have to impact many lives.

"I have a cousin who has Asperger's and had he had a program like this when he was younger, his life today would be dramatically different," said Fauer of his cousin who is now in his mid-60s.

Also impressed by what he saw and heard was former New York Knicks star Earl "The Pearl" Monroe. The basketball legend spent

part of the evening talking with Friendship Circle families and teens, learning how the organization seeks to improve the lives of participants and volunteers.

"Lots of things happen in life and thank G-d there are organizations like this that can help us along the way," said Monroe.

Everywhere one looked throughout the evening, the strength and abilities of individuals with special needs was on display. Several Friendship Circle teens helped open the formal part of the

Family Programs Foster Unity and Support



It was a celebration of sisterhood as thirty moms gathered together recently for a special "Lunch Break" program just for them. On the agenda was great food and conversation, plenty of smiles and even a class on fruit decorating.

The lunch event is just one of the many networking opportunities Friendship Circle offers each year for the parents, grandparents and siblings of children and teens with special needs. A program for dads, for instance, was scheduled for mid-June, and sibling programs are offered throughout the year.

Cindi Eckstein, a mother of two boys ages

6 and 2, attended the Lunch Break so that she could meet other moms. "It can be isolating when you have kids with special needs," she said. "These events provide moral support and the feeling that you are not alone."

Follow newcomer Lori Marcus was impressed by the people she met at the Friendship Circle and the moms' event.

"I just really like the energy of the group. It's a great environment and a great way to network and meet other moms," said Marcus, who also has two boys, ages 12 and 15.

Talking to other parents who have



Patricia and Kevin Cummings



Arlene and Michael Gordon



Mara and Steven Simon

program by participating in a musical performance by a group of FC teen volunteers.

One of the evening's most moving moments was a video about Friendship Circle volunteer Keren. As the first teen volunteer when Friendship Circle began 15 years ago, Keren had spent her free time befriending a child with special needs. As a high school senior, a car accident left her severely injured and in a coma for a year. Today, Keren continues to volunteer with

the Friendship Circle and participates in Friendship Circle programming. LifeTown, she said in the video, "is her dream."

But to have that dream come true will take the community's involvement, said several speakers throughout the night.

Noting that nearly \$7.5 million has been raised to date for the construction of LifeTown, Friendship Circle Executive Director Rabbi Zalman Grossbaum told the crowd that they needed to reach \$10 million before the work can actually begin.

The project is expected to cost \$13.5 million, a relatively low sum considering the size and scope of the project, but an amount made possible because of many in-kind donations.

Leslie Williams-Wexler, an occupational therapist, and her husband Steve Wexler came to show their support for the Cummings and called LifeTown "fabulous."

"What you are doing here," she said, "is beyond comprehension."

children with special needs allows for "joint understanding" and can lead to concrete ideas, as Marcus explains: "They can say 'Oh, this worked for me.'"

And that's part of the point, say Friendship Circle organizers. Noting that FC parents often have additional pressures and time constraints – with doctor appointments, therapy, hands-on care and more -- programs like the Lunch Break are crucial in giving them time to unwind.

According to a survey by the National Alliance of Caregivers in association with AARP, caregivers spend nearly 30 hours a week providing care to a child with special needs and 50 percent of respondents say that caregiving affects

their time to be with other family members and friends.

"Research indicates that families who have a child with special needs benefit from the emotional support and information they receive through formal and informal groups. However, I believe that participating in Friendship Circle programs provides the extended family with a far more valuable resource," says Dr. Barbara Lauer-Listhaus, a clinical neuropsychologist and FC parent. "Parents and siblings have the opportunity to relax, unwind and spend time with their 'circle of friends,' and strong bonds develop as the participants watch their children grow up together. In many ways, these families become more than friends, they become an extended family."





HONORING FC VOLUNTEERS

More than 165 teens were awarded the Jerry Waldor Special Needs Fellowship Award at this year's annual Friendship Circle Volunteer Celebration. The award is presented to middle- and high school students who contribute more than 30 hours of service to Friendship Circle. Seated in the middle of the award winners is Rita Waldor, who told the crowd that her husband put his "heart and soul" into the Friendship Circle. In addition to the Waldor Fellowships, 15 teens also received a President's Volunteer Service Award, a national award presented to those who have dedicated significant hours to the cause of helping others.



EDUCATORS TOUR LIFETOWN

Administrators from public and charter schools from throughout Essex County visited LifeTown recently to learn how their students will utilize this unique setting. Teachers, superintendents and others were amazed at the project. As they were leaving most had the same question: how soon can our students can take part in Life Village educational workshops?



GIRL SCOUTS DESIGN BIRTHDAY CARDS

Fourth-graders from Hartshorn Elementary School in Short Hills, all members of Girl Scout Troop No. 22789, came to LifeTown recently where they crafted birthday cards for Friendship Circle youngsters and got a tour of LifeTown. One of the highlights for the 32 students was the chance to use the Samsung Gear VR, a virtual reality headset, to take a "walk" through the village at LifeTown.

Bar Mitzvah Boy Throws Purim Carnival for FC Kids

The holiday of Purim is a time of celebration and fun, not to mention costumes, candy and carnivals.

But for children with special needs, all of the associated noise and activity of the holiday can sometimes have the opposite effect, which made Nathan Orbach's decision to have a Purim carnival for the children at Friendship Circle a particularly moving experience.

"I volunteer at the Friendship Circle every Sunday with Braeden, and this year, as a bar mitzvah project, I wanted to have part of my celebration at the Friendship Circle," Nathan explained, noting that he and Braeden have been friends for about a year. Nathan also participates in the Friends @ Home project visiting 4-year-old Connor on Friday afternoons.

In a winter that saw snowstorm after snowstorm, including one on Purim day itself, getting the carnival off the ground wasn't a sure thing. With assurances from Friendship Circle, the carnival went on as scheduled and dozens of families came out to enjoy the fun.

Plans for the carnival began long before the actual event, and Nathan was involved every step of the way.

"Nathan sat down with Esty Grossbaum [Jr. division program director] to discuss what would be appropriate for the Friendship Circle children," his mother, Dara Orbach, said. "That was a real lesson for him as each element had to be thought out and appropriate.

"He also wanted to encourage the kids in his grade to volunteer with Friendship Circle as well, so he gave his classmates jobs at the various booths and working with Friendship Circle kids to make hamantaschen," she added.

Though it may seem like planning an event of this kind is a lot of extra work, Orbach

said the FC staff makes everything as easy as possible and is convinced others can do similar programs as well.

One of the moments that gave his parents the most "*nachas*," joy, happened before the carnival even started as they watched their son wait for Braeden to arrive so Nathan could introduce the boy he plays with Sunday morning to his classmates.

"He wasn't just excited that this was the kickoff to his bar mitzvah and that his friends from school would be there," instead he was excited that he could celebrate with his friends from the Friendship Circle as well, Orbach said, adding "A bar mitzvah shouldn't just be about the party, it should have meaning and focus, which is what doing a chesed is all about. It sets the tone of what's important in life and that's to help others, which makes it a great way to celebrate."



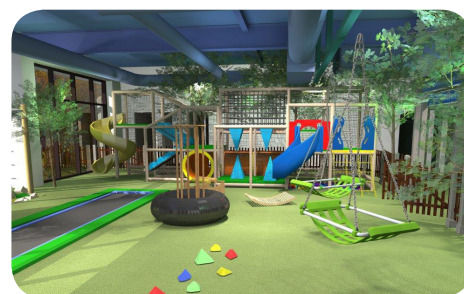
Nathan Orbach (left) and Sammy Mayer with their friend Braeden

SENSORY PARK

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children and their families. We look forward to opening day, when children of all abilities and their families will be able to enjoy this wonderful facility."

The "Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey Sensory Park" will fill an enormous need for a state-of-the-art, fully accessible playground, which will provide hours of fun for all children regardless of their abilities. With floor-to-ceiling glass windows that will allow for abundant light and bring the outdoors in, the sensory park will include a gated entrance, trees, benches, a rock-climbing wall, cheese pit, swings, and slides.



"The Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey was a catalyst in the creation and initial growth of Friendship Circle," said Friendship Circle Executive Director Zalman Grossbaum. "We now look forward to their continued partnership in building LifeTown. The impact of their generous gift will benefit thousands of children for years to come."

