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THE *Simcha* ISSUE

A One-Stop B'nai Mitzvah Shop

B'nai mitzvah vendors gather to make planning easier
BY EMILY PAUKER

It's March already, a realization that means different things to different people: Resolutions made two months ago are, predictably, coming to a premature end; Passover is just around the corner; springtime. But for parents of Jewish pre-teens? The b'nai mitzvah planning season has begun for those kids celebrating their big day next winter or spring, or even two years from now. Where to begin? Whatever your vision, however elaborate or simple you plan to make your child's big day, you can get started this month with a local, convenient solution: The eighth annual Bar/Bat Mitzvah Expo, sponsored by BESA, from noon-4 p.m. March 7 at the Hilton Torrey Pines in La Jolla.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Event Services Association is a San Diego organization comprised of a carefully selected group of 65 diverse vendors who specialize in b'nai mitzvah parties. If you haven't heard of BESA yet, you most likely will once your children and their friends reach the age of b'nai mitzvah, co-president Lydia Krasner says. Each year, BESA helps plan a large percentage of the b'nai mitzvah parties around San Diego, and its annual Bar/Bat Mitzvah Expo is often the first step in the process.

With attendance at the 2009 Expo hovering around 1,300, Krasner is projecting attendance to increase to about 1,500 this year. At the Expo, parents (and their kids) can meet the most trusted, reliable and entertaining vendors under one roof, BESA co-president Patricia Del Rio says.

"[Vendors] have to have performed 75 or more bar mitzvahs in the core categories to be considered for membership [to BESA]," Krasner says. "These are the people who really focus on bar and bat mitzvahs and know what they're doing."

Within the pool of vendors are past-president Sherill Kinsler, owner of Behind the Scenes Events, and co-presidents Krasner of Mitzvah Events and Del Rio of Del Rio Studios. Kinsler founded BESA and served as president for eight years, stepping down this year so she could focus her energies on community outreach, including working as

founding member of BESA, and Del Rio joined the organization shortly afterward as a photographer.

This year's Expo, "Passport to your Perfect Party," offers free admission to all guests who register. In addition to browsing vendors' booths, guests will enjoy giveaways, music, prizes and performances. Kids in attendance will also receive their own wish list, where they can keep track of the vendors they like. In a sense, the Expo itself is just a taste of what b'nai mitzvah parties have the potential to be.

"All these kids are planning their bar and bat mitzvahs together," Krasner says. "They see their friends from Sunday school [at the Expo] and ask them, 'When is your date?' and they say, 'Isn't that guy with the bubbles cool?'"

In past years, a *tallis* fashion show and hip-hop performers have been on the agenda. As of press date, this year's Expo agenda had not been finalized, though Krasner says performers will likely be pulled from BESA's vendors.

"[Attendees will] have to come to the Expo to see what surprises we have for them," Kinsler says. "We don't like to be that scheduled because I like the element of surprise."

Another new addition to the Expo, Kinsler says, is booths to promote nonprofit organizations that would make good recipients of community service performed for mitzvah projects.

"For the kids who don't know what they're doing for a mitzvah project yet, this will be a great place [to consider some options]," Kinsler says.

According to Krasner, parents should plan on arriving early and staying for the full four hours. Once kids arrive, she says, "you won't be able to pull them away... They haven't gone to any of these types of things yet, and they haven't experienced anything like this yet. This exposes them to some of the possibilities that they might want to have for their own event." ☆

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Expo sponsored by BESA
Hilton La Jolla Torrey Pines
10950 North Torrey Pines Road
La Jolla, CA 92037
www.besandiego.com for registration form
(858) 674-1664 • Event parking: \$3

TOP: Lydia Krasner and Patricia Del Rio are co-presidents of BESA, which sponsors the Bar/Bat Mitzvah Expo. BOTTOM: Last year's Bar/Bat Mitzvah Expo was as entertaining as it was informative.

