

# Simcha

## SEEKING INSPIRATION

For BESA members, inspiration for b'nai mitzvah party themes comes from all over

BY ALANNA BERMAN



A consistent theme is important at any bar or bat mitzvah, but the task need not be daunting — this party used “colors” as a theme.

PHOTOS BY PATRICIA DEL RIO/DEL RIO STUDIOS

Professional party planner Lydia Krasner knows her way around a bar or bat mitzvah. As co-president of San Diego organization BESA (Bar and Bat Mitzvah Event Services Association) she's helped to gather the best local vendors — in everything from photography to entertainment to lighting to caterers to deejays and more — to make planning an exceptional celebration as easy as cake. By facilitating community contacts through BESA, she has her own pool of vetted professionals from which to choose when planning the b'nai mitzvah for her own clients, too. For each party,

which she personalizes to the child's tastes as much as possible, the key to bringing all these elements together seamlessly is having a cohesive, prominent theme. Creating something new and unique for each child might seem like a daunting task, but she and BESA co-president Patricia Del Rio say you just have to look around to be inspired.

“I get my inspiration from everything,” Krasner says. “From walking through Marshall's, watching Food Network, wallpaper designs, fabrics, patterns on china, window dressings, colors and even something like desserts and

cupcakes. There are so many things that can dictate a theme, but for me as far as a design element, it can be anything.”

Once a theme has been selected, all the other elements don't automatically fall into place. Krasner says she is constantly on the lookout for ways to bring it into the party.

“Recently, I worked on a party that was camping or Boy Scout themed, because this was something that was really important to the bar mitzvah boy,” she says. “We thought about how we could incorporate it into everything at the event. For example, instead of lounge furniture,



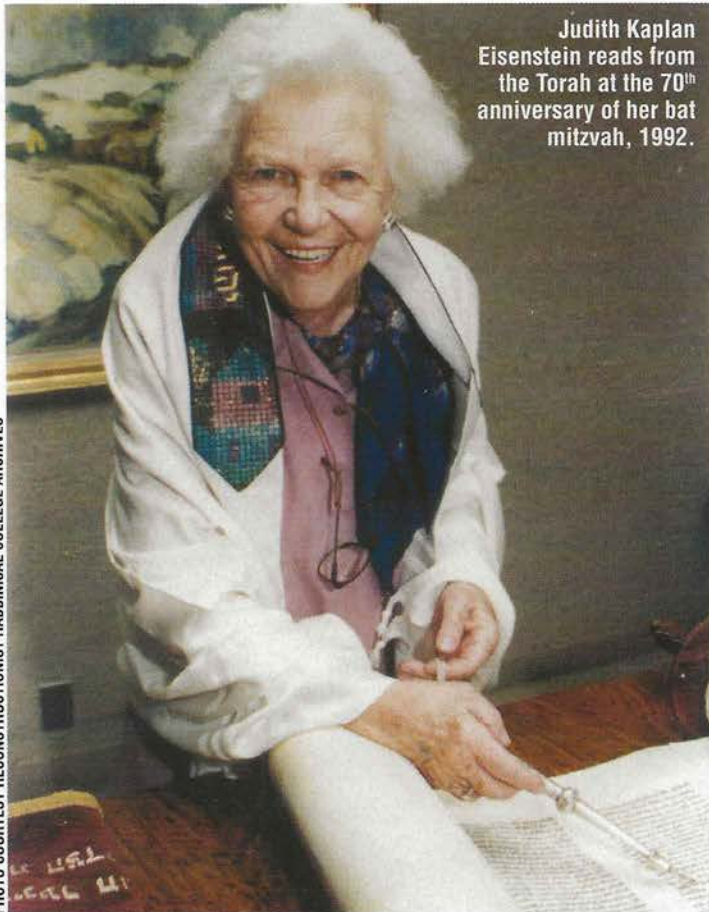
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Judith Kaplan Eisenstein reads from the Torah at the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her bat mitzvah, 1992.

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classes given to children," Karlstein says. "It was a two to three year course, teaching the Bible, the Psalms, the Sages, Jewish history, holidays and other religions, as well as the meaning and order of the service."

Though the more advanced educational component helps to differentiate adult b'nai mitzvah, the experience tends to take on added personal and spiritual significance for its students.

This may come from the fact that these adults are choosing to go through this process rather than being forced to do so as a reluctant teenager by their parents.

"When you become bar or bat mitzvah as a child, most times you really don't want it, but your parents do, and it's an obligation," Karlstein says. "As an adult, it's because you want to accomplish this wonderful achievement."

Although some teenagers do embrace the moment to enter adulthood, adults tend to have a greater appreciation of it.

"It was thrilling to read from the Torah and my portion of the Haftorah in front of everyone," she adds. "All in all, it was a wonderful day to share with my children, grandchildren, family and friends." ✧



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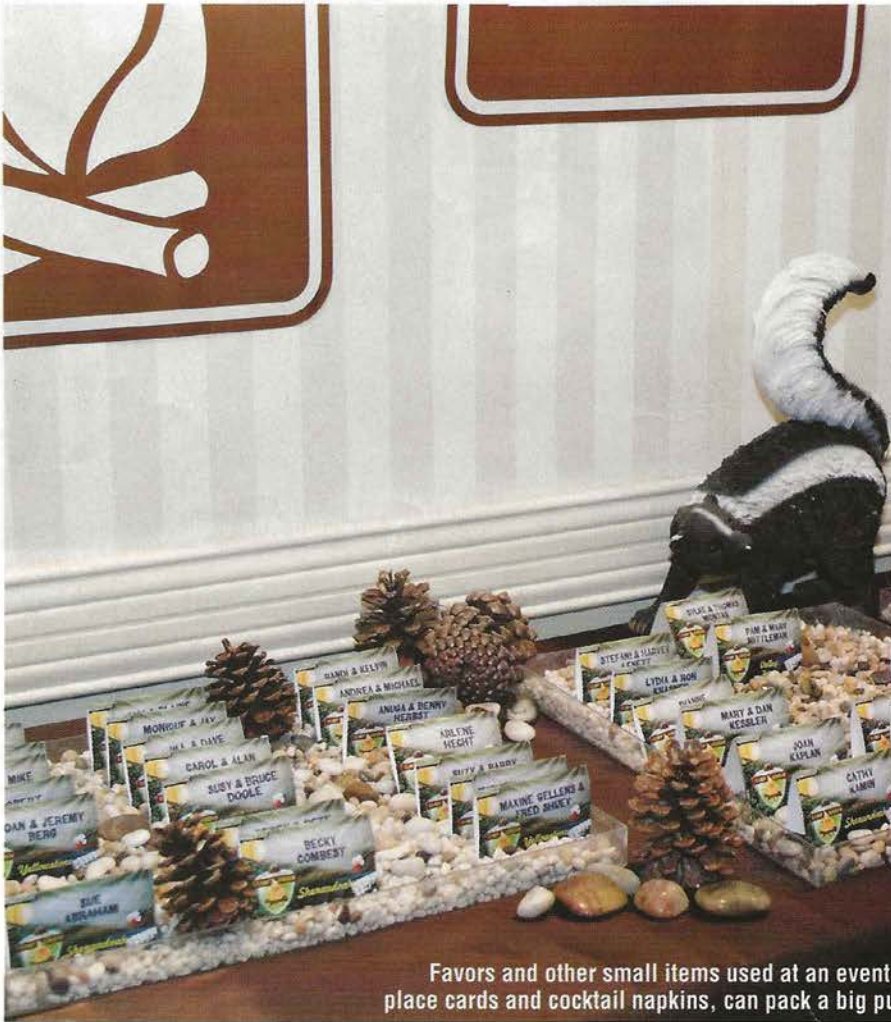
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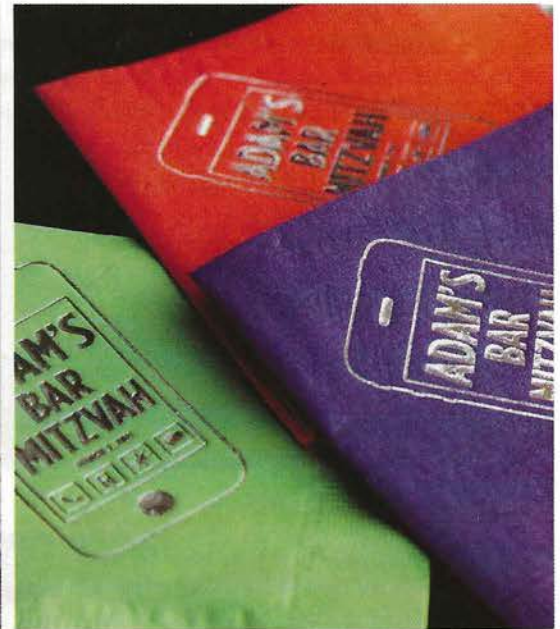
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Favors and other small items used at an event, like place cards and cocktail napkins, can pack a big punch.



we used folding chairs and tree stumps. We had a lot of pine cones and natural elements all over the room, and the centerpieces were made from camping lanterns, which I found on a trip to Costco months before the event.”

But what about when deciding on a theme is difficult for the child and his or her family? Krasner and Del Rio say a theme need not be complicated.

“A lot of people come to me and say their kid is a ‘no theme Sally,’” Krasner says. “Their kids do a little bit of this and a little bit of that, and they don’t know where they should go with the

theme. So I start with something as simple as the child’s favorite color and go from there, choosing complementary colors, and on and on. You can do the whole party around a color, and maybe use the child’s name, or a large initial everywhere. A simple idea can turn into something amazing.”

Del Rio adds that for parties where a child’s name or nickname appears on everything, from the napkins to the wall décor, the repetition makes everything come together, even without a very defined theme. And though planning such a party may seem easy, a lot of elements and planning go into an event of this magnitude.

But with a list of BESA members in her back pocket, Krasner says planning an event is much simpler. All BESA members are voted in by the current membership based on key elements of their business. Do they understand the meaning behind a bar or bat mitzvah? Do caterers know the difference between “kosher style” and glatt kosher? Will photographers and videographers be sure to capture specific moments unique to the occasion? How well will vendors work with one another and with the family? Thanks to their stellar track records, all BESA-approved vendors have been vetted time and time again.

“My job is to match people with vendors that are appropriate to their theme and their budget, and when that can be a BESA member, it’s like a family,” Krasner says. “The BESA relationships are really important.”

All vendors play a crucial role in the continuity of an event, Krasner says, which is why it is so important to be sure they know what is going on once they arrive at the venue.

“I work really closely with the deejays, especially those BESA deejays, structuring things so that we can make sure everything runs smoothly,” Krasner says. “For the Hora, the





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deejay plays a really important role in getting that shot of the kid in the chair, so you need someone who will know to tell the people holding that chair to face wherever the photographer may be. It's why BESA members are BESA members, because they think about these things."

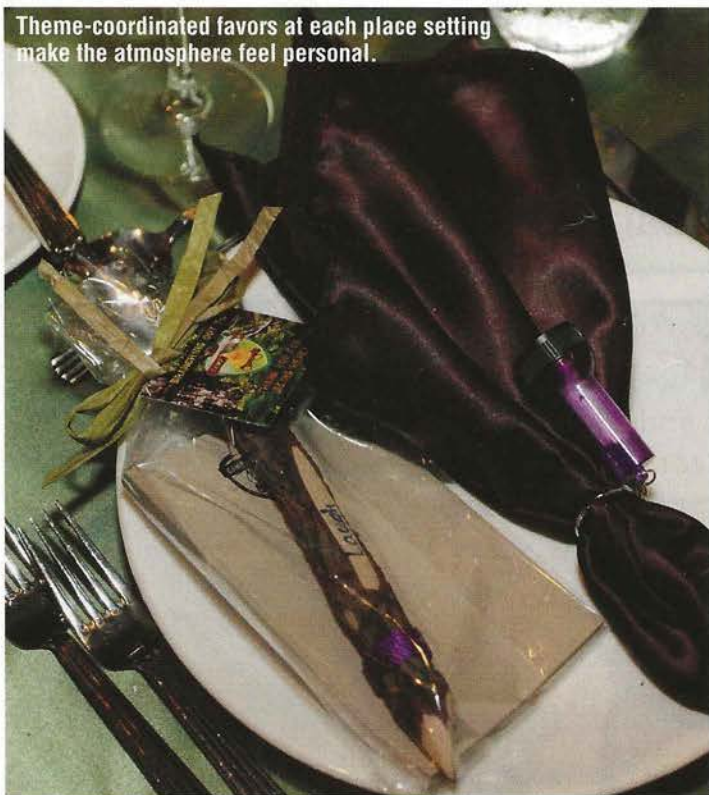
One way the community can meet all the BESA members is at the group's annual expo, this year slated for noon-4 p.m. March 10 at the Hilton Torrey Pines. The theme behind this year's event (even the BESA expo has a theme!) is a play on San Diego's status as annual host city for the comic book convention, Comic-Con International. "Mitzvah-Con" is free to families of b'nai mitzvah-aged children and will allow those kids and their families the chance to meet with vendors, sample their wares and explore the options for their own event. Of course, they'll be greeted by some classic comic book superheroes milling about and will enjoy the theme carried out in each booth.

"I'm the age of the parents," Krasner says, "so for me, I think of the old-school comics like Superman and Wonder Woman, and for the kids, it's all



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Theme-coordinated favors at each place setting make the atmosphere feel personal.

the new-school comics, so this is a theme that will really appeal to both the parents and the kids who attend this event."

The annual expo aims to bring to life BESA's unique place in the b'nai mitzvah planning industry: A community of vendors with one common goal — to make the bar or bat mitzvah the best it can be.

"BESA is a one stop shop," Krasner says. "We're adding new members all the time, and our annual expo always showcases the latest trends for families who want a unique event." ☆

To learn more about Mitzvah-Con or to view a complete list of BESA's members, visit [www.besasandiego.com](http://www.besasandiego.com).



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