

## Young volunteer making a difference for seniors



**ON DISPLAY:** Courtney Tabor is pictured after leading a Shabbat service at The Palace.

Courtney Tabor, a 13-year-old student at Southwood Middle School in Palmetto Bay and a resident of Kendall, not only takes community service work seriously for someone her age, she also has set her sights on what she wants to be when she “grows up.”

In the eighth grade, Tabor has been doing volunteer work at The Palace Suites in Kendall, where she has been assisting with Shabbat services for the past one and a half years as a mitzvah (good deed) project. She also recently helped lead the senior residential community’s first night Seder and Passover dinner.

Tabor said it all came naturally to her. “I knew I wanted to do community work that involved services and Judaism when my bat mitzvah started creeping around the corner,” Tabor said. “So, I talked to a teacher my sister had for Hebrew school, who I knew led services at The Palace, and asked him if I could help, too. He said ‘yes’ and that’s what got me started.”

As a skill some adults might find challenging, Tabor has mastered the delivery of the service in English and Hebrew. But beyond the opportunity to lead the traditional ceremony, it is the residents who make it worthwhile for her.

“What I like most about The Palace are the people who are there,” Tabor said. “I had no idea I could feel so fondly about them and they are practically like family now. I really enjoyed leading this first night’s Passover Seder. I helped last year as well, but this year I led a lot more than before. I was grateful and honored that they don’t treat me like a child and allow me to lead them in prayers.”

Additionally, Tabor is an assistant teacher, a Hebrew tutor and an office helper at Congregation Bet Breira in Kendall. She’s active in Bet Breira’s youth group and also helps the music teacher there. She has volunteered for many mitzvah projects in the community and does her volunteer work at The Palace Suites on Friday afternoons.

Courtney lives in Kendall near Killian High School with her parents, Patrick and Kimberly Tabor, and an older and a younger sister. Her mom took a moment to explain their feelings about their daughter’s volunteer efforts.

“My husband and I are extremely proud of the work Courtney does for others,” Kimberly Tabor said. “What began as a mitzvah project turned into a lovely relationship between her and the residents she spends time with every week.

She looks forward to seeing them; visits them if they are ill; prays with them, and, I believe, adds a lot to their week as well.” Tabor was helped with the first night Seder and Passover dinner by Elliot Levy, a freshman at Coral Reef High School, who assists with services from time to time at The Palace Suites, since his grandfather is a resident there. For Tabor, helping with the services is not just a temporary interest; she also has long range plans.

“I really want to become a rabbi and I plan on going to a rabbinic school after my college years,” Tabor said. “I’m hoping that after I’ve completed my rabbinic education, I can come back to Bet Breira as a “rabbi-in-training.”

Angela Saiza, Director of Entertainment and Activities at The Palace, appreciates the volunteer work done by the 13-year-old. “We’re thrilled about Courtney’s participation here,” Saiza said. “It really adds to the presentation of the services, and she also helps with the consistency since she fills in for Ken Levy when he’s not here. Additionally, the residents really enjoy her. It’s nice to see a nice young face. She has a beautiful future in front of her.

“We’re just thrilled that she’s a part of our program. Everybody benefits,” Saiza said. “At The Palace, we provide events and activities that observe and honor all cultures and backgrounds and religions, so we are always striving to be inclusive of all of these important traditions. Courtney is a part of that.”