

Weiss envisions youth group with ‘culture of giving’

It is a trend among bar and bat mitzvah students to perform acts of tzedakah as one of their first adult responsibilities. Julia Florence Weiss, who will become a bat mitzvah Feb. 15 at Congregation Beth Israel, proposed an idea that has been incorporated into the long-range Strategic Plan of the Oregon Jewish Community Foundation. According to John Moss, interim director of OJCF, the organization is committed to inspiring the younger generation to recognize that “a community created by the kindness of their grandparents is not just an inheritance to be taken for granted.” The children need to prepare to carry on that work, he said. “Fortunately, we’ve had a little help from a corner of the community where we least expected it,” said Moss. On Oct. 16, 2002, he said, OJCF received “a most unusual request.” Julia Weiss had written a letter describing a youth

philanthropy group that had begun under the wing of the San Diego Jewish Community Foundation. Weiss said she hoped to organize and lead a similar group for students in grades 7-10 in Portland. To enter the program, each student would raise a minimum of \$36 from friends, family and other sources. The students would visit at least one Jewish and one non-Jewish organization and would share their observations with the group. The group would then make grant decisions based on its findings. Weiss wrote, “I think this would make kids feel like a powerful part of their community.” Weiss contacted the director of the San Diego Jewish Community Youth Foundation and obtained their operation instruction manual, and in her letter she outlined how the organization would work. Moss praised Weiss’s “vision and proactivity.” He said her

research resulted in the board’s quick consideration and adoption of the idea. The youth organization would teach the meaning of tzedakah (acts of righteousness), gemilut chasidim (acts of lovingkindness) and tikkun olam (repairing the world). In addition, students would be exposed to the needs of the community and would learn to make informed choices about giving. Weiss wishes to become a part of the “culture of giving” personified by her late grandfather, Philip Feldman, who was a past president of Congregation Beth Israel and a leader and philanthropist in the community. “If all goes as planned, Julia’s actions will be the beginning of a legacy,” said Moss.