

Ben Feeds Back: Making a Difference in Phoenix

Written by Ashley R. Carlson
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A bar mitzvah gives young adult men the chance to show their caring for others through a “Mitzah Project,” which is a decree in the Jewish tradition to perform a good deed and prove one’s righteousness. A 12-year-old in Scottsdale has taken this assignment to another level however, garnering state-wide attention and involvement for his cause: Ben Feeds Back. AFM talked with Ben about what his project entails, where the idea came from, and how our community can help to feed the multitudes of homeless women and children in our Valley on Sept. 30.

AFM: You mention on your website that the culmination of Ben Feeds Back is for your bar mitzvah, with the Mitzvah Project being a way to show care as a human being. Why did you choose homeless families to support?

BG: I wanted to do something that had meaning to me. Other than sports, I love food and going to nice restaurants. I once saw a video when a man surprised a group of homeless people with a nice meal—sort of as a nice prank—but they all loved it so much and felt special. It was really cool. I want to make people feel happy and that there is hope. These kids and their families never get to go out for food or do nice things. I wanted to make them feel special.

AFM: How did you go about organizing this project? Did you contact UMOM? How much of this project have you organized yourself?

BG: It took a lot of steps at first. I had to ask lots of people to help me, research homeless shelters and try to find a location, design a website, and much more. When I asked Chef Matney to help me, I told him I still didn’t have a location yet. My mom and I went to see a few shelters and spoke to lots, but none were the right fit. Chef Matney gave us a contact at UMOM. My mom reached out to them first. I have done a ton of the work, but my mom helps me with the organization. Every day now, I am writing emails to people, updating my website and blog, still looking for suppliers and certain volunteers and trying to keep up with school and sports. It’s a lot of work.

AFM: Can you tell us what the night will be like? Is it a surprise? Any idea what food will be served, the décor, etc.?

BG: It is going to be a surprise for the people who come. The room is going to be draped off so they can’t see in. When they walk in, they will be greeted by a host and seated as if they’re in a restaurant. The tables will have tablecloths and there will be decorations. It will look fancy. I also

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plan on having music. As for food, there will be three courses: the first will be salad, then an entrée of short ribs, pasta and steamed broccoli with baby carrots, and finally dessert. I don't have dessert donated yet, so I am still looking for a bakery to make 200 individual fancy desserts.

AFM: How have you been reaching out to vendors for products and assistance? Who has volunteered to help?

BG: Many vendors I went to speak to in person, some I have called on the phone and then sent an email. So far I have the following vendors: Chef Eddie Matney, McClendon Farms, Shamrock Foods, Rocking R Farms, Circle Key Farms, Local-One, Creative Occasions, Araya Photography and 48-Hour Media. I also have lots of volunteers for the actual event.

AFM: What do you feel this project has taught you?

BG: Take your time on things to get them right, if you don't ask for something you don't get it at all, how to create and edit a website and write a blog. Also, that doing a project like this a lot of work, a lot of people don't have things that I have, and there are a lot of nice people out there who want to help.

AFM: And finally, how can we help?

BG: There are many ways people can help! One: help spread the word. Post my website, www.benfeedsback.com, to your Facebook page and share it with all of your friends. The more people who know about this, the more donations I can get for UMOM. Two: be cool and make a donation through my website to UMOM. You can get a dollar for dollar tax credit up to \$400 if you select the working poor tax credit. That means your money can go to UMOM instead of your taxes to the state of Arizona. Three: I am still in need of the following items: 600 stems of random flowers, a bakery for individual dessert for 200 people, a bakery for dinner rolls for 200 people, prestige wear (fancy plastic plates, silverware and glasses), and drinks. If you can help with any of this, email me at ben@benfeedsback.com.

To learn more and donate any of the above, go to: www.benfeedsback.com.