

Jewish holiday spirit adrift?

By TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

Whether Hanukkah, the family-oriented festival of lights that takes place Saturday through Dec. 27, is becoming overcommercialized depends on who you talk to.

Some believe the holiday remains as magnificent as ever in bringing families together to commemorate the Jews' struggle for religious freedom and personal liberty. But others are concerned Hanukkah is becoming the "Jewish Christmas," with parents pressured to shower their children with gifts.

"Maybe it's becoming too commercialized," said West Bloomfield resident Panny Sherman, among several interviewed at random Monday afternoon outside the Jewish Community Center.

ter. "The kids are just thinking, 'We want gifts, we want gifts.' That's not the meaning of the holiday."

Sherman emphasized that's not what happens in her household, however.

"We light the candles every day and read books. The kids know the story of Hanukkah. But we exchange a couple gifts," said Sherman, leaving the JCC along with her 5-year-old son Jonathan and 3-year-old daughter Stefanie.

Agreeing was another West Bloomfield resident, Irene Beck. "It's much more commercialized than it should be," Beck said. "I don't want to take away the (religious) importance of it."

In the Beck household, "minor" gifts are exchanged. But more importantly, other traditional aspects of Hanukkah are celebrated:

the Menorah candle is lit; rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem is discussed; and the favorite game involving a spinning top ("dreidel") is played.

"That's what we've always done," Beck said. "Because that's how I was brought up. So I continued the tradition in my own home."

But according to Beck, too much is made of Hanukkah compared to other Jewish holidays such as Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Passover. "It's the parents that have to be willing to prioritize and set the example for future generations," Beck said. "... build up the holidays that should be built up."

Dave Shulman of West Bloomfield wasn't so sure Hanukkah is much different today from when he was a youngster. He said the

holiday's meaning is still as strong as ever.

"It's a joyful holiday, equivalent to the Christian Christmas. There's good fellowship. Over the years, it seems the same to me," Shulman said.

Calling Hanukkah the "greatest festival there is" was a Bloomfield Hills man, who asked his name not be published.

"The whole story is magnificent," he said. "It's something you always remember. . . I was raised with it as a kid, my kids are being raised with it and it's still magnificent."

Harold Goodman of Franklin, however, agrees the holiday is veering toward commercialism in too many homes.

"I think it's become over-commercialized," Goodman said.

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Scouts' mission gathers 350 coats for needy

Thirteen-year-old Boy Scout Bill Dugman and the rest of Troy's Troop 1707 went on a mission Dec. 5 — a mission to collect coats. And boy, did they — some 350 coats.

Led by Bill, whose efforts were toward an Eagle Scout Award, the scouts scoured a two mile area by posting fliers and getting neighbors to clean out their closets. Then, they picked up the donations — from trenchcoats and

jackets to full-length winter warmers.

After a little homework, Bill decided to donate the child-sized coats to the Pontiac Rescue Mission and the adult coats to the Clinton Valley Center, a division of the Michigan Department of Mental Health.

As a group, the 40 scouts logged more than 200 hours of community service on this mission alone.

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