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Alper JCC Maccabees/Maccabettes brings dads, kids together for fun

By Linda Landy

Ask any parent and they will tell you that they struggle to spend quality time with their children.

First you have to eliminate the hours when mom and dad are at work and the kids are at school. Subtract the time spent driving carpool, commuting, grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning and folding laundry. Then there are the inevitable sports leagues, music lessons and dance classes. School steals more time with homework, studying and the dreaded group projects. Oh, don't forget the football and baseball weekends.

Okay, somehow you have found a few hours to spend with your kids, but wait, they are locked in their room playing video games, glued to the television or sleeping over at a friend's house.

Often, it is even more difficult for fathers to spend quality time with their kids. My husband discovered that I never complained when he went off to play golf—as long as he took the boys with him. I realize that golf is not for everyone. How else can fathers spend quality time with their kids?

Let me tell you about the Maccabees and Maccabettes program at the Dave and Mary Alper Jewish Community Center which provides a unique opportunity for fathers and their children to spend quality time together while enhancing their Jewish identity. Fathers (or grandfather or surrogate father-figure) and children-- sons or daughters, kindergarten through grade five-- plan fun activities and events. Groups are organized based on grade level and gender of the child.

The purpose of the Maccabee/Maccabette program is to enhance the father/child relationship. The program focuses on the importance of the role of a father in a child's development and is designed to reinforce Jewish ideals, values and history.

New chapters are formed each fall. Families often recruit their friends and join the program as a group. Those who don't have their own group are placed into an age appropriate group by the JCC. Although one dad is enlisted to lead the group, each father picks a month and plans the activities.

The beauty of Maccabees/Maccabettes is the flexibility of the program. The dads and kids tailor the activities to the interests of the group.

Roger Snyder is a JCC member who has a child in pre-school, a daughter in Maccabettes, an older son and a grown daughter. "Maccabettes gives me an opportunity to spend one on one time and make a connection without competition from the other children. I really look forward to the meetings because it is away from the chaos and it is a great time for us to be together. Actually my favorite part is our talks going to and coming home from the meetings and just discussing what we did," said Snyder.

This year his chapter made pillows and is bringing them to the seniors at The Palace as a mitzvah project, decorated t-shirts which the girls and their dads wear whenever they get together and are planning a trip to a firehouse where one of the dads is a firefighter. The girls like Maccabettes because they like to spend time with their dads and their friends—and they love the craft projects. Can you imagine the sight of the dads ironing the decorations onto the t-shirts?

The highlight of the year is when all of the Maccabees and Maccabettes chapters get together and travel to the Circle F Dude Ranch in central Florida. It is 48 hours of campfires, songs, racing cardboard boats the kids build themselves, horseback riding and s'mores. The chapters also get together during the year to ride the airboats at Billie Swamp Safari in the Everglades.

For more information on the Maccabees and Maccabettes, call Elyse Molk, Children's Director, at 305-271-9000, ext. 263 or email emolk@alperjcc.org.