

Sarah's 'One light at a time'

By RISA POLANSKY *IJN Intern*

For her upcoming August Bat Mitzvah, Denver sixth-grader Sarah Rockford's goal is to foster Judaism in Eastern Europe "one light at a time."

Rockford, a student at Graland Country Day School, will be partnering with artist Gary Rosenthal to create hand-made candles and candlesticks to donate to Jewish communities in the Ukraine, near the area where her grandfather, David Bram, a Holocaust survivor, was born.

"I think it means a lot to him that we're doing this and that Judaism is coming back in the area where he was born," Rockford said of her grandfather. "To be giving back to these communities where there's a big resurgence of Judaism is really meaningful."

The HEA, Rockford's synagogue, requires that all Bar and Bat Mitzvahs complete a *mitzvah* project, "but I wanted to do something unique," Rockford said.

Her mother, Renee Rockford, discovered artist Gary Rosenthal and his Hiddur Mitzvah Project in **Hadassah** Magazine. The project is designed to teach Jewish youth about religion and social responsibility through creating functional Jewish artwork. "This thing just took off," Rockford said.

On Sunday, June 5, in Denver, Renee and Sarah Rockford gathered with friends to create 60 pairs of hand-made candlesticks.

In July, the Rockfords will travel to the Washington, DC, area to work with Rosenthal to fire the pieces and mount them on copper.

Rosenthal has been sculpting for more than 30 years. Works from his line of Judaic art, The Gary Rosenthal Collection, have been presented to presidents from Jimmy Carter to George W. Bush.

"It feels really special that I could connect with this famous artist," Rockford said. "It's really amazing."

Half of Rockford and friends' candlesticks will return to their creators in Denver after their completion, and the other half will arrive in Chernigov and Priluki, Ukraine, in time for Rosh Hashanah.

In addition to the artistic aspect of her project, Rockford has also asked not to receive Bat Mitzvah gifts. Instead, she wants family and friends to donate to the Hiddur Mitzvah Foundation, created by Rosenthal to encourage *tzedakah*.

The donations will purchase Torah scrolls for a needy community in Eastern Europe.

"It's bringing back my religion," Rockford said of her project. "A big part of a Bat Mitzvah is learning about your religion, and this is helping other people do that as well."

A generous and mature soul, Rockford said the decision to forgo gifts in favor of donations was an easy one to make, and she is thrilled to have her grandparents underwrite her project.

"That's the best present they could give me," she said.

Information about the Hiddur Mitzvah Project: 1-800-962-1545.