

LA 13-year-old donates \$13K to help injured troops

By SHAYA TAYEFE MOHAJER - Associated Press

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LOS ANGELES -- To celebrate becoming a man, a Los Angeles teen donated a sizable chunk of his bar mitzvah gifts to help injured American troops.

Joshua Neidorf, 13, gave \$13,000 to University of California Los Angeles' Operation Mend program on Thursday, following his Jewish rite of passage.

"It's really important to me to help out the people who have kept us safe and protected our country," Neidorf said.

Neidorf was inspired to make the gift after growing close to Army Sgt. Louis Dahlman, who was injured by a roadside bomb in Iraq in 2007. As a "buddy family," the Niedorfs family extended their friendship to the soldier through his long series of jaw reconstruction surgeries.

The program provides him with housing, transportation from his east Texas home, and other aid to make possible the trips to the Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center.

- <http://operationmend.ucla.edu/>
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During those trips, the Neidorfs taken Dahlman to dinners at his favorite restaurants, taken him on trips to the Rose Bowl, a Dr. Phil taping, the beach and other local attractions.

At Neidorf's rock and roll-themed birthday party in September, he encouraged guests to make donations after showing them a video of an interview with Dahlman discussing his injury.

Dahlman said he was touched by Neidorf's gift to a program that had brought them together.

"It's amazing that he's willing to give from his own money to such a great cause," Dahlman said.

Philanthropist Ron Katz, who helped establish the program in 2007, said Dahlman now has a regular-shaped face and new teeth, he's able to eat normally - "and he has a whole new group of friends who learned about him, and who he learned from."

Each Operation Mend recipient typically costs about \$500,000 and as of October, there were 72 men and women in the program from all branches of the military.

Online:

<http://operationmend.ucla.edu>