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## Baseball, turtle, superhero-themed holiday trees for a cause? You bet

By Sarah Peters



The array of trees in the lobby at Palm Beach Gardens Medical Center includes a Hanukkah bush, superhero-themed tree and tree covered in turtle ornaments. The hospital is auctioning off the trees for Place of Hope. (Sarah Peters/The Palm Beach Post)

### PALM BEACH GARDENS —

A festive, holiday tree-decorating contest is making the season brighter for hundreds of children who are spending it away from their families.

Step into the lobby of Palm Beach Gardens Medical Center, and you'll be surrounded by 20 Christmas trees and Hanukkah bushes that would make Martha Stewart proud. The hospital staff and volunteers from community organizations decked out the 4-foot, pre-lit trees with everything from lottery tickets to Matchbox cars to superheroes.

People have already started bidding on the trees in a silent auction, pledging more than \$100 for some. Bidding starts at \$50 per tree.

The money will go to Place of Hope, a Palm Beach Gardens nonprofit, so that foster children can get the full holiday experience in a family-style setting.

The faith-based organization places children in both family-style foster care cottages on its campuses and in traditional foster homes. Young adults who have aged out of the traditional foster care system can stay in Place of Hope's Villages of Hope duplexes and learn to live on their own.

The silent auction will continue through Monday. A holiday party at the hospital starts at 6 p.m. All are welcome.

Hospital CEO Dianne Goldenberg said the decorating was a "big spirit-booster." The staff got competitive, too.

"Everybody was kind of keeping their theme a secret, not telling anybody," she said.

A hospital's environment affects people's sense of well-being. They do better when they feel it's a place of healing, and the cheery trees help promote that, Goldenberg said.

The Loggerhead Marinelife Center's tree is obvious when you see a coastal-chic tree covered in turtle ornaments. Roger Dean Stadium sprinkled its tree with baseballs, baseball cards and other swag.

Joshua Kolkana, director of Place of Hope's Homes of Hope and Villages of Hope, said the time off from school between holidays allows children and young adults in Place of Hope's care to spend more time with their house parents and each other.

They may go bowling, to the movies or to other activities that help them develop relationships, he said. Anything experiential changes whether they feel loved and cared for, he said.

Community partners buy gifts on a registry, but money from the tree auction and gift cards help fill in the gaps, he said. Place of Hope may get a new child or sibling group a day or two before Christmas who will get gifts, too, he said.

Someone donated real Christmas trees for each of Place of Hope's cottages that the children and their foster parents decorated together Thanksgiving night or weekend, Kolkana said.

"That's the first time a lot of our kids have ever done something like that as a family," he said.