

Christmas commercialism intrudes on Hannukah

By Mona Z. Koppelman
Daily Nebraskan Senior Editor

Editor's Note: This story originally ran in last year's Daily Nebraskan holiday supplement.

Five pairs of brown eyes anxiously watch five plastic tops spin furiously on a piano bench. Five small boys guess which side their top dreidel will land on. The winners slap each other on the back.

"Dreidels are OK, but I can hardly wait till next Hannukah," one boy said. "I'm going to get a Snow Speeder."

Hannukah is a Jewish holiday which bears little resemblance to

Christmas, but the difference between the two is often misunderstood. The issue is further clouded by what some Jews view as the encroachment of Christmas commercialism on Hannukah.

Hannukah commemorates the successful Jewish revolt against the Seleucid Greeks and their king Antiochus in 165 B.C.

"Antiochus tried to Hellenize the Jews," said Rabbi Kenneth White of the South Street Temple, 20th and South Streets. "People who studied Torah or women who circumcised their children were put to death. The Temple in Jerusalem was defiled."

Mattathias, an elderly priest, opposed this tyranny.

He and his five sons, the Maccabees, organized a rebellion which eventually swept the oppressors from the area. The Temple was recaptured by the Jews, purified and rededicated. Hannukah means "dedication."

"The legend goes that Jews went looking for pure olive oil to light the Temple lamps," White said. "They found one vial with only enough oil for one day. But the oil burned eight days, and the miracle of the lights became part of Hannukah tradition."

Jews continue to kindle lights for eight days in December. Other traditions include dreidels, special songs, prayers, foods — and presents given out each night.

"The idea of presents started out in a minor way," White said. "Then, as Christmas became a major holiday, presents started playing a bigger part."

White said people tend to equate Christmas and Hannukah because gift-giving is involved in both, but he emphasized that the similarity ends there.

"Christmas celebrates the birth of God, or part of God," he said. "Hannukah celebrates the first rebellion of religious freedom in recorded history."

Hannukah is widely regarded as one of the more minor holidays in the Jewish year. White said it has seen a "major" emergence come about in proportion to Christmas.

"There is really no philosophi-

cal reason to make it (Hannukah) a major holiday," White said. "Jews don't normally celebrate military victories. That's why we focus more on the miracle of the lights."

Harry Allen, UNL director of instructional research and planning, said he thinks there is more emphasis on Hannukah among families with children.

"I think parents want to make Jewish kids feel they have something," said Allen, a member of the Tifereth Israel Synagogue, 3219 Sheridan. "It started in the late 1950s and 1960s, with mass media commercialization."

Sheldon Schuster, UNL associate chemistry professor, said he thinks Hannukah tries to compete with Christmas.

Continued on Page 5

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Mission makes holiday cheer

By Lisa Nutting
Daily Nebraskan Staff Reporter

Joyce has 5 children, all younger than 12. She is not married, nor does she have a job. Aid to Dependent Children payments are her only income.

Last Christmas, Joyce's family and 1,475 people were able to give and receive gifts through the Christmas Care Project of Lincoln's People's City Mission, 124 S. Ninth Street.

The care project allows the poor and needy to enjoy gift-giving during the holidays without having to pay for the presents. They select presents from gifts which are donated to the mission, and give them to their immediate families.

Also, food baskets are given to the needy at holiday time. During Thanksgiving, 136 baskets were given — the mission anticipates just as many, or more, to be given

out over the holidays. And for those staying at the mission, "ditty bags" and knitted scarfs are presents given Dec. 25.

Joyce and her family were not living at the mission last December, but they were very much involved with the care project.

"My ADC is what it takes to pay the rent and bills," Joyce said. "We definitely wouldn't have had a Christmas otherwise (without the care project)."

And last year Joyce and her family were given a Christmas tree, "with tinsel and all." A Christmas tree is a rare decoration around her home, she said.

This year Joyce plans to apply again for toys for her children. And to show her appreciation, she is a volunteer at the mission, and helps put together the food baskets.

"The mission is very special to

me," Joyce said. "You can tell they really care."

Donny Ritter and Dave Frattalone have stayed at the mission on and off for more than a year now. Each has his own reasons for living there. Donny had been living in a group home and went to the mission when he was released.

Dave was a transient and is now staying at the mission, "until I'm ready to go to school," he said. Dave hopes to attend a technical college and train to become a missionary's assistant. Both men work at the mission and are in the long-term restoration and renewal program.

Donny recalled last year — he was able to visit his family in Lexington for the holidays with the help of the mission. The mission helped him buy a bus ticket. Since last year, Donny said, the mission has changed his whole life.

Continued on Page 9



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