

Boy's Bar Mitzvah project bridges cultures

By **MATT PILON**
Staff Writer

EASTHAMPTON — Major League baseball recruits many of its star players from Latin America, where children without the financial means to purchase proper equipment often use cut up milk cartons for gloves, sticks for bats, and crumpled newspaper for balls.

One local boy wants to make sure that children there have the necessary equipment to follow in the footsteps of their heroes.

Williston Northampton School student Alex Garcia, 12, of Holly Circle, has set up four locations for the donation of gently used baseball equipment, which he will send to Roberto's Kids, a nonprofit founded in the memory of Roberto Clemente, a Puerto Rican Hall of Famer who died in a plane crash bringing relief supplies to Nicaraguan earthquake victims.

Garcia, an avid baseball fan and player, is collecting the equipment in preparation for his Bar Mitzvah in June. Charitable work is one of the many requirements Garcia must fulfill for the coming-of-age ceremony.

Garcia's mother, Laurie, is Jewish, and his father Eugenio, who teaches Spanish at the Williston Northampton School, is from Spain.

"He loves baseball and we're also Spanish speakers, so he wanted to combine different things using his two cultures," Laurie Garcia said.

Alex's favorite player is Dominican-American Alex Rodriguez of the New York Yankees (his own Little League teammates call him A-Gar).

Alex said he hopes the dona-

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tions will help produce more A-Rods and more Clementes.

"These kids usually are the better baseball players in the major leagues once they get older," Alex said. "I think it would really help them."

"They become baseball stars but they remember where they come from," Laurie Garcia said.

The donation stations — located at the Little League field snack shack, the MacDuffie School in Springfield, the Congregation B'nai Israel in Northampton, and at Eugenio Garcia's office at the Williston chapel — have already netted approximately 10 bats, cleats, gloves and some catcher's equipment, Garcia said.

The locations will remain through the end of June. For additional information, e-mail Alex at agarcia@williston.com.

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