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Credit cards to benefit charities in Israel issued in South Florida

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South Florida's Jewish community is being courted to get what may be the first credit card to benefit charities in Israel.

While there are hundreds of nonprofit organizations that urge their supporters to make purchases through a VISA or MasterCard that is set up to automatically give them a payment, the focus of the charities is usually in the United States.

The new card targeted to the Jewish community here and across the United States - being marketed through e-mail blasts and newspaper advertisements this week in Jewish publications - is called HAS, or Heritage Affinity Services, and was created by two Long Island businessmen. Some of the charities in the HAS plan include the Jewish National Fund, which plants trees, builds reservoirs and creates parks in Israel; the Gush Etzion Foundation, which creates playgrounds, furnishes schools and assists needy families; A Time, which offers support for couples experiencing infertility; One Family Fund, which provides assistance to terrorism victims; and Chabad's Children of Chernobyl, which brings children from the contaminated areas of Belarus and Ukraine to Israel for medical treatment.

Run through U.S. Bank, the cards issued are VISA or MasterCard.

"This is the first one in the affinity world that focuses on Israel or another country," said Debbie Bear, relationship manager for U.S. Bank. "They created this organization solely for this card. They are very engaged and dedicated to the cause."

HAS creators Menachem Landau and Zev Dobuler said they are banking on the idea that American Jews want to support Israel, and this is an easy way for them to do so.

"Credit cards are so heavily used in the U.S. that it was a natural choice to come up with a credit card product that is not only as good as anything they already have in their wallets, but make charitable contributions, too," said Landau.

Tanya Turner, senior vice president at U.S. Bank, won't say exactly how much money goes to the charity from each purchase customers make, saying that's a contractual arrangement. But of the 115 affinity cards the company has, the charity donations have paid for things like a new football arena for one U.S. university, and restroom renovations at Yellowstone National Park for a park preservation nonprofit organization.