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# Courier News

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## NEEDY CASES FUND

### Martin Luther King Youth Center gives kids the opportunity to shine



For more than 50 years, the Martin Luther King Youth Center in Bridgewater has served underprivileged kids ages 5 to 13 in the Somerset County area. PROVIDED BY MLK YOUTH CENTER

# ‘Nurture each child’s potential’

**Cheryl Makin**  
MyCentralJersey.com  
USA TODAY NETWORK – NEW JERSEY

For more than half a century, the Martin Luther King (MLK) Youth Center in Bridgewater has been a cornerstone of hope, education and opportunity for children across Somerset County. What began as a small community idea in the early 1970s has grown into a thriving educational hub that continues to inspire generations. Executive Director Rajni Chopra, who has dedicated 35 years to the Center, describes the mission simply. “We want our children to succeed –

in school, in life and in everything they dream of becoming,” she said.” Serving underprivileged children ages 5 to 13, the Center enrolls 55 students each school year. Families rely on MLK not only for safe, structured after-school care, but for a nurturing academic environment that helps their children grow and excel. The demand is high, Chopra said, and a waiting list forms annually. The Center is a welcoming place for children from Bridgewater, Bound Brook, South Bound Brook, Manville, Raritan and Somerville. Many are from low- to middle-income households. “Every child is unique, and our pro-

gram reflects that,” Chopra said. “We aim to nurture each child’s potential by providing them with the tools and guidance to explore their interests, build friendships, and learn essential life skills in a safe, joyful environment.” According to Chopra, MLK’s programs are designed to support the whole child. Students participate in daily homework help and tutoring, character-building and leadership lessons, STEM enrichment through ConstructU and the Hillsborough High School Robotics Team, and creative activities such as arts and crafts, reading

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## NJ backs hepatitis B vaccine for newborns

**Scott Fallon**  
NorthJersey.com  
USA TODAY NETWORK – NEW JERSEY

New Jersey health officials reaffirmed that all newborns should receive a hepatitis B vaccine within 24 hours of birth, as a federal panel stacked by Robert F. Kennedy Jr. with vaccine skeptics may reconsider the recommendation at

a meeting this week, officials said on Monday, Dec. 1. New Jersey was joined by six other states in backing the hepatitis B guidance under a coalition formed this year called the Northeast Public Health Collaborative. The group aims to develop its own vaccine policy, fearing that federal policy favoring vaccines will be eroded under Kennedy’s leadership as

Health and Human Services secretary. “We can protect against these risks by vaccinating babies during the delivery hospitalization at the very beginning of their lives,” Jeff Brown, the acting state health commissioner, said in a statement. “The hepatitis B vaccine at birth has

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## ROCKEFELLER CENTER

### Franklin choir tapped for Christmas tree lighting

**Cheryl Makin**  
MyCentralJersey.com  
USA TODAY NETWORK – NEW JERSEY

Franklin High School’s GoldN’Blues Choir is thankful this holiday season for winning the opportunity to perform at Rockefeller Center. Choirs of youth singers between the ages of 6 and 18 in the metropolitan area are invited to submit a video audition of them singing a holiday song for a chance to win and perform at the annual Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree Lighting ceremony. The annual competition is hosted by NBC New York and Telemundo 47 in partnership with “The Kelly Clarkson Show.” “I couldn’t be prouder of our incredible GoldN’Blues vocal group and the proud Warrior tradition they embody,” Schools Superintendent John A. Ravallo said. “Their performances are nothing short of inspiring. Winning this competition presents a wonderful opportunity for them to showcase their talent on a much larger stage. And behind their success is the extraordinary dedication of their advisor, Ms. Radvanski, an outstanding example of the passion and commitment our teachers bring to our students every single day.” Cesar Rainho, supervisor of Fine Visual Performing and Practical Arts, said that winning the competition exemplified the district’s belief that

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 **Political Stile**  
Charles Stile  
USA TODAY NETWORK

### NJ Democratic stooges tried to shame Andy Kim

As New Jersey’s junior U.S. senator, Andy Kim is treated with a measure of cordiality and deference in the corridors of the Unites States Capitol in Washington, DC. But at the Statehouse in Trenton on Dec. 1, that deference disappeared. Kim’s fellow Democrats made him cool his heels in a committee room. They made him miss a scheduled 1p.m. train back to Washington. “Nobody is special,” said state Sen. Jim Beach, the Camden County Democrat, rejecting a plea made by several people in the audience to extend the courtesy of letting him testify early in

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