

YEAR’S BEST READS   CHECK OUT THE NOTEWORTHY MYSTERIES AND THRILLERS THAT HIT BOOKSTORE SHELVES IN 2025. **F4**

# Sunday

## The Times

SPECIAL REPORT

### ‘Jews feel very alone, very scared’



Synagogues in Teaneck and elsewhere have increased security and surveillance. Illustration by JoAnne Coughlin Walsh

*In a state with more than 600K Jewish residents, intimidation, harassment and threats against their communities run rampant in New Jersey.*

**Jeff Roberts and Matthew Enuco**  
*For Times of Trenton*

The dentist’s phone started ringing one day in July. And it wouldn’t stop. The menacing calls and messages kept coming, flooding the Freehold office’s landline. Extremists then inundated Rimma Chertog’s personal cellphone and social media accounts with antisemitic venom. “I wish you to be killed and raped, disgusting Zionist whore, you deserve to be tortured, Auschwitz is where you all belong,” one text message read. Another wished her young son would “drop dead Amen.” Chertog’s practice became an epicenter of hate, doxxed with anti-Jewish vitriol and death threats. Her crime? The mother of three co-founded a local chapter of Run for Their Lives, a group that hosted running events to raise awareness of the hos-

tagues in Hamas’ Oct. 7, 2023, terrorist attack in Israel. “I’m not one of those Jews with trembling knees,” Chertog said this summer, her voice still carrying traces of her Eastern European roots. “I actually feel like their intention is to make us afraid. So we’re going to do the opposite. We’re not going to be afraid.” But the native of Moldova never expected to face antisemitism like this in her adopted home of New Jersey. Not in a state with more than 600,000 Jewish residents, one of the largest populations in the world outside of Israel. Yet a climate of fear has engulfed the Garden State, casting a pall over Jewish communities. The surge of hate that began in the years before the COVID-19 pandemic exploded during the war in Gaza in a tidal wave of intimidation, harassment and threats. It has been fanned by far-left leaders, Gen-Z influencers and social media, often under the guise of criticism of Israel, its foreign policy and the plight of Palestinian civilians, NJ Advance Media has found in a six-month investigation. Much like far-right figures, these extremists are engineering outrage and breeding a culture of hostility by exploiting legitimate issues — the war in Gaza, alleged Israeli war crimes and the deaths of tens of thousands of Palestinians — into justification for intolerance here. Out-of-state agitators are heed-

ing their call, bringing antisemitism to the doorsteps of Jews in New Jersey. While the vitriol might have softened since the peace deal brokered in September between Israel and Hamas, experts fear the bloody Dec. 14 ambush of a Hanukkah celebration in Australia is part of a new normal of anti-Jewish violence and terror. The conflict in Gaza has been wielded as a weapon to vilify and marginalize Jews, according to some experts. So has the ensuing campaign against Zionism — the belief that Israel should exist as a Jewish state, a core tenet of the faith for many. “Anti-Zionism is just the latest excuse to be antisemitic ...” said David Zimmermann, senior research fellow at George Washington University’s Program on Extremism. “To be antisemitic is no longer a fringe thing. It’s normalized.” Over the past two years, Jews in New Jersey have been beaten, harassed and threatened. Bomb threats have been made. Calls for genocide have been shouted on suburban streets. Even communities with large Jewish populations weaved into their very fabric — like Teaneck and Bergenfield — say they are living in fear. Some admit with shame in their voices that they’re hiding their identity in public, worried a yarmulke or Star of David will slap a bull’s-eye on their children. **SEE SPECIAL REPORT, A6**

COMMERCE

### Jersey malls think small, countering setbacks in big retail

*Opportunities pop up for offbeat tenants to fill a gap left by chain stores.*

**Nyah Marshall** *For Times of Trenton*

When Nika and Alban Corbett opened Curate Noir inside the Moorestown Mall in 2021, nearly everything else in the eerily echoing mall was shuttered around them. Their new venture — a gift shop filled with products from Black- or brown-owned businesses — was one of about five still standing in the mall during the pandemic. At the time, New Jersey was still under an indoor mask mandate, and mall corridors across the state were quiet. Storefront gates came down and longtime tenants went dark, with some never recovering. “It was risky because we didn’t know what was going to happen,” Nika Corbett said. “There weren’t a lot of stores open



Alban and Nika Corbett in 2021 opened Curate Noir at the Moorestown Mall, which has been losing department store anchors for years. Neil H. Davis, for Times of Trenton

yet, and we weren’t even sure if stores were going to reopen.” Even before the pandemic, Moorestown Mall had been losing major department store anchors for years, including Sears,

Lord & Taylor and Macy’s. Built in 1963, the Burlington County mall, like many shopping centers across the state, saw those losses accelerate as online shopping grew, forcing it to rethink how it could survive. Today, where Sears once stood, there’s a Cooper University Health Care medical facility at Moorestown Mall. Trendy restaurants and entertainment options have moved in, and a 375-unit apartment complex is under construction next to Boscov’s, the mall’s last remaining department store anchor. Inside the mall itself, a different transformation is taking place. A few familiar names, like Hot Topic and Claire’s, are holding on, but many others have been replaced by offbeat, unexpected tenants — the kind of businesses you wouldn’t think to stumble across in a mall a decade ago. A slime bar, children’s play areas, gaming spaces, a dog-training facility, CBD-infused products and even a private 4D fetal imaging studio now fill storefronts once **SEE COMMERCE, A4**

ECONOMY

### Bankruptcies soar as firms grapple with inflation, tariffs

*In shift from previous years, rise in filings most apparent among companies tied to manufacturing, construction and transportation.*

**Aaron Gregg and Jaclyn Peiser**  
*Washington Post*

Corporate bankruptcies surged in 2025, rivaling levels not seen since the immediate aftermath of the Great Recession, as import-dependent businesses absorbed the highest tariffs in decades. At least 717 companies filed for bankruptcy through November, according to data from S&P Global Market Intelligence. That’s roughly 14% more than the same 11 months of 2024, and the highest tally since 2010. Companies cited inflation and interest rates among the factors contributing to their financial challenges, as well as Trump administration trade policies that have disrupted supply chains and pushed up costs. But in a shift from previous years, the rise in filings is most apparent among industrials — companies tied to manufacturing, construction and transportation. The sector has been hit hard by President Donald Trump’s ever-fluid tariff policies — which he’s long insisted would revive American manufacturing. The manufacturing sector lost more than 70,000 jobs in the one-year period ending in November, federal data shows. Consumer-oriented businesses with “discretionary” products or services, such as fashion or home furnishings, represented the second-largest group. This contingent usually tops the list and includes many retailers, and its retrenchment is a signal that inflation-weary consumers are prioritizing essentials. The S&P data reflects both Chapter 11 and Chapter 7 filings. In the former, also known as a reorganization, the business goes through a court-administered process to restructure its debts while it continues to operate. Under Chapter 7, the company closes down and its assets are sold off. **SEE ECONOMY, A9**



NATION & WORLD

### 4 types of autism

Scientists are redefining autism as a complex condition with multiple forms, each defined by a constellation of behaviors and genetic traits. **C3**

LIFE

### Best movies of 2025

Many of the year’s most memorable films seemed to center on tortured male artists overcoming trauma. **F1**