

Courier News

New fine dining in a Central Jersey landmark destination. **TABLE, 1B**

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PLAY BALL! Somerset Patriots start spring training. **IN SPORTS, 1C**



Autism music fest is the brainchild of 14-year-old Fanwood girl



Mallory Banks, 14, has been raising awareness and funds for autism research in honor of her older brother, Ethan, 16. COURTESY OF THE BANKS FAMILY

Rockin' for Autism

CHERYL MAKIN @CHERYLMAKIN

FANWOOD – Mallory Banks is dedicated to shining a light on the autism spectrum. Since 2011 — when she was only 9 — Mallory has tirelessly raised awareness for autism and more than \$10,000 for research. Autism hits close to home for Mallory because her older brother, Ethan, 16, is diagnosed with the neurodevelopmental disorder.

This year, the 14-year-old is amping it up a notch with her brainchild — the Rockin' For Autism Music Festival. Intended to raise awareness and funds for autism research, Saturday's all-day festival features more than her annual bake sale. With musical acts, food trucks, vendors, autism workshops, raffles, an obstacle course, sports clinics and the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Youth Baseball Opening Day ceremony, the event is sure to rev up awareness and donations to the cause as it marks Autism Awareness Month.

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"I felt like I needed to do something because of my brother. For the past few years, I've had a lot of success in raising funds for autism awareness by hosting bake sales and raffles. This year, I wanted to do something bigger and better, and get more of the community involved. Every year, it gets bigger and bigger and more of the community becomes involved. That tells me I have their support."

MALLORY BANKS, 14-YEAR-OLD CREATOR OF THE ROCKIN' FOR AUTISM MUSIC FESTIVAL



This file photo shows an NJ Transit train in Matawan. FILE

NJ Transit funds safety tech, OKs union deals

MIKE DAVIS @BYMIKEDAVIS

NEWARK - Safety technology. New railroad tunnels. Union contracts.

These have been the major issues faced by NJ Transit over the last year and steps taken by the agency's board of directors on Tuesday ensure they're moving forward.

The board is next scheduled to meet on May 12, likely the first meeting featuring newly-minted Executive Director William Crosbie, who starts in the role on April 25.

Positive train control

With another three years until NJ Transit has positive train control installed, the board approved a \$1 million purchase for radio frequency.

Positive train control monitors and controls train speed to prevent collisions and derailments, especially on sharp curves. The technology would have prevented a fatal Amtrak derailment near Philadelphia last year, according to the National Transportation Safety Board.

But since much of the Northeast operates on shared railroads — NJ Transit's entire Northeast Corridor

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Gov. Chris Christie remained entrenched in his position about a takeover of Atlantic City.

Atlantic City's pain reaches past its borders

ANDREW FORD @ANDREWFORNEWS

TRENTON - Fallout from Atlantic City's financial meltdown could mean trouble beyond the gambling resort's borders.

Autism

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Rockin' For Autism Music Festival runs from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at LaGrande Park in Fanwood.

Mallory's efforts began with a bake sale on a soccer field that netted \$500 five years ago. She was inspired by her McGinn Elementary School's celebration of Autism Awareness Month. Her father, Jeff Banks, said it was her "first taste of making of difference." She went on to raise thousands with her annual bake sale.

"I felt like I needed to do something because of my brother," she said. "This year, I wanted to do something bigger and better, and get more of the community involved. Every year, it gets bigger and bigger and more of the community becomes involved. That tells me I have their support."

All proceeds from Saturday's event will be donated to Autism New Jersey, the largest statewide network of parents and professionals dedicated to improving lives of individuals with autism spectrum disorders.

Mallory became devoted to raising funds and awareness in honor of Ethan and all those affected by autism spectrum disorder. One of the state's top-grossing Autism Awareness Junior Ambassadors, Mallory also was recognized by her hometown with a Mallory Banks Day in 2013.

"Because Ethan has autism, I believe that it is important to educate the community and help in any way that I can to support fundraising for autism," Mallory said. "I feel happy about raising this money to help my special brother. The more we raise awareness, the better chance that one day there will be a cure. I'm very excited about Saturday."

It is Mallory's hope that this event not only doubles her past fundraising endeavors but also becomes an annual event. Mallory conceived of the music festival last year while recovering from spinal surgery. Since Ethan is a big music fan, the family thought it was a good concept for this year's effort. Mallory hopes Ethan enjoys Saturday's event as much as he has liked the previous bake sales. He has attended every one.

"I don't know that he has a grasp of why we are having the music festival, but he is aware of it," she said. "I'm pretty sure he is going to enjoy the day."

In September, during the township's annual Fannywood Day, Mallory pitched the idea to Mayor Colleen Mahr, who quickly jumped on board. With assistance from her parents, Jeff and Gina Banks, and other volunteers, Mallory worked hard to line up musical acts and sponsors in hopes of raising at least \$7,000 this year — double what she raised with her bake sale in 2014.

"The Rockin' For Autism Music Festival is like a dream come true, and I am so excited that our mayor and so many local bands and businesses have committed to



Mallory Banks (third from right) started her charitable efforts with bake sales, such as this one from 2014. She does it for her brother Ethan (third from left).

COURTESY OF THE BANKS FAMILY

helping me raise funds for autism awareness," Mallory said.

"Mallory Banks is an extraordinary girl, whose passion for raising awareness for autism is truly inspirational and sets an example for others to follow. I am honored to be able to support her efforts and applaud her deep commitment to community advocacy," Mahr said. "With everything that the Rockin' For Autism has to offer, I am confident that the annual festival will exceed expectations in terms of raising awareness and funds, and will have a long-lasting, positive benefit for Fanwood, as well."

Community effort

Among the many local musical acts scheduled to perform are Goodworks, a rock and soul band led by Scotch Plains resident Paul Lavenha that is dedicated to helping nonprofit organizations; Three-Piece Nugget, a classic and modern rock cover band; Broadcaster, which is composed of four Scotch Plains natives who play classic to current rock from the '60s through today; Leave the Gun, a hard rock band led by Fanwood's Frank Castucci that plays songs from the late '60s through today; and original guitar rock by Eric Harrison's Crash Course. Main Source DJs will emcee the event.

The event will feature a variety of autism clinics, including workshops by Jammin' Jenn, which uses music therapy to connect with special-needs children and adults. Autism New Jersey, Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital and Children's Specialized Hospital will be available to help spread awareness. Tiny Tots Therapy will offer a sensory pit and hold their "Super Heroes" group for kids, Temple Shalom of Scotch Plains will have information about its "Inclusion Taskforce" and religious school program for special-needs students, while Functional Performance Therapy will demon-

strate the benefits of massage therapy for autistic children.

Many local businesses and organizations have also pledged to support the festival, including Frank's Auto Repair of Fanwood, GrillStone, Rich Tric Photography, Temple Shalom and The JCC of Central NJ of Scotch Plains, The MAX Challenge and Cesar Kai Academy in Cranford, Cindy Smith Dance Studio of Garwood, Main Source DJs of Wood-

bridge, Watchung Pediatrics and New Jersey American Water of Voorhees. Dermatologist created skincare products Rodan and Fields, jewelry vendor Chloe and Isabel, henna tattoos by Dip's Fashion Conception, glitter tattoos by Glam Pam and the Glitter Overload, craft projects by Be Craftful of Fanwood, Pete the magician and Edison's Eddie Lin the Awesome Balloon Creator will also be on hand to entertain and offer their wares.

Food and refreshments from Nick's Pizza and Deli of Fanwood, Fanwood Bagels and Deli, Picklelicious Pickles, an empanada food truck, funnel cake, and — as a nod to Mallory's original fundraising efforts — homemade baked goods by more than three dozen local bakers will be on the menu.

As the festival coincides with the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Youth Baseball Association's annual opening-day ceremony, Mahr will throw the ceremonial first pitch to start the 2016 SPFYBA baseball season. The Wolves Basketball Academy will run clinics on the basketball courts, and the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Soccer Association will organize impromptu games.

Those wishing to donate online may do so at <https://www.crowdrise.com/rockin-for-autism-2016/fundraiser/rockinforautism2016>. To volunteer, sponsor or exhibit at the event, contact Jeff Banks at 973-464-5477.

For more information about Autism New Jersey, go to autismnj.org.

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