

“
Life’s most persistent
and urgent question is,
‘What are you
doing for others?’”

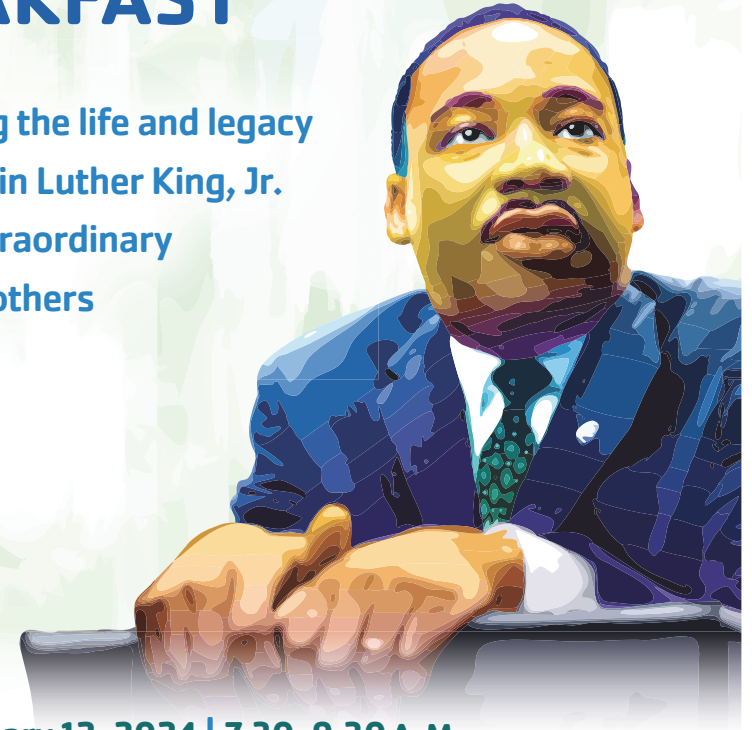
– Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



HOSTED BY
YMCA OF GREATER MONMOUTH COUNTY

35TH ANNUAL COMMEMORATIVE BREAKFAST

Celebrating the life and legacy
of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
and his extraordinary
service to others



Friday, January 12, 2024 | 7:30–9:30 A.M.

Ocean Place Resort

1 Ocean Blvd, Long Branch, NJ 07740



» ymcanj.org/mlk

124-7067-FD

YMCA OF GREATER MONMOUTH COUNTY

170 Patterson Avenue
Shrewsbury, NJ 07702

732.671.5505, ext.120
giving@ymcanj.org

YMCANJ.org



Here for all.
Financial assistance
is offered based on
availability of funds.



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

WITH SINCERE APPRECIATION

Thank you to today's sponsors for their generous support of this event.

FUTURE LEADERS SPONSOR



ESSAY CONTEST SCHOLARSHIP SPONSORS



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT SPONSORS



CHANGE MAKER SPONSORS



SOCIAL JUSTICE SPONSORS



Tasha Youngblood-Brown

With gratitude to our 2024 MLK Planning Committee:

Chair Michael A. Wright
Seiden Krieger

Latonya Brennan
Arthur J. Gallagher

Natasha Davis
VNA Health Group

Maria Diaz
New Jersey Resources

Lori Ferguson
Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield

Sue Harbison
HABcore

Thomas Hayes
New Jersey Natural Gas

Itzel Hernandez
American Friends Services

Darryl Hughes
Hackensack Meridian Health

Loryn Lawson
Byrnes, O'Hern & Heugle

Gwendolyn Love
Lunch Break

Samara O'Neil
Porter Plus Realty

Gilda Rogers
T. Thomas Fortune Foundation

Dr. Pamela Scott-Johnson
Spelman College

Rev. Ronald Sparks
Bethel AME Freehold

Laurie Goganzer CEO, Teicia Gaupp, Pam Hearn, Stacey Lastella, Josh Reed, Jo Ann Rountree, Kim Saldida
YMCA Staff

STRENGTHENING GENERATIONS FOR 150 YEARS!

Our Y is celebrating **150 years** of strengthening lives!

We believe that strong individuals help to shape resilient communities when we come together for social good.

Stay connected in **2024** for events that celebrate our impact and welcome all.



LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING

By James Weldon Johnson

Lift every voice and sing, till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise, high as the list'ning skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.

Sing a song full of the faith
that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope
that the present has brought us;
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod, bitter the chast'ning rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat, have not our weary feet,
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?

We have come over a way
that with tears has been watered.
We have come, treading our path
thro' the blood of the slaughtered,

Out from a gloomy past, till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam
of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years, God of our silent tears,
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who hast by thy might, led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.

Lest our feet stray from the places
Our God where we met Thee,

Lest our hearts drunk with the wine of the world
we forget Thee;

Shadowed beneath Thy hand
May we forever stand,
True to our God,
True to our native land.

PROGRAM

WELCOMING REMARKS

Michael A. Wright, MLK Committee Chair
& YMCA Chief Volunteer Officer

FLAG SALUTE

Freehold Family YMCA Child Care Youth

INVOCATION

Pastor Terrence Porter,
Pilgrim Baptist Church, Red Bank

35 YEARS OF MLK COMMEMORATION 150 Years of YMCA Impact

Laurie Goganzer, CEO,
YMCA of Greater Monmouth County

ESSAY CONTEST INTRODUCTION

Thomas Hayes, New Jersey Natural Gas
Samara O'Neill, Porter Plus Realty

1ST ESSAY CONTEST Winner Reading

Anika Ajgaonkar,
Biotechnology High School

2ND ESSAY CONTEST Winner Reading

Madelyn Sanchez-Berra,
Red Bank Regional High School

PRESENTATION OF ESSAY AWARDS

KEYNOTE INTRODUCTION

Dr. Pamela Scott-Johnson, YMCA Board Member

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Dr. Maysa Akbar, Chief Diversity Officer |
Chief of Psychology in the Public Interest,
American Psychological Association

YMCA MLK HUMAN DIGNITY Award Introduction

Reverend Kerwin Webb, Pastor,
Second Baptist Church, Asbury Park

YMCA MLK HUMAN DIGNITY Award Honoree

Suzanne Dyer,
Executive Director, Parker Family Health Center

YMCA SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY Award Introduction

Senator Vin Gopal

YMCA SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY Award Honoree

Ritesh and Asha Shah
Ritesh Shah Charitable Pharmacy

YMCA TOGETHERHOOD® Champion Award Introduction

Jayden and Yulissa Gomez

YMCA TOGETHERHOOD® Champion Award Honorees

Kelly Ellis-Foster, Community Volunteer

BENEDICTION

Reverend Ronald Sparks, Bethel AME Freehold

LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING

Bernadine Wilson Gibson

CLOSING REMARKS

Michael A. Wright

INSPIRING OUR YOUTH

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. 2024 YMCA ESSAY CONTEST

High school students throughout greater Monmouth County were invited to respond by writing a 300-word essay to the question:

The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure as it relates to racial equity, social justice, and Dr. King's dream. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS

Anika Samir Ajgaonkar is a senior at Biotechnology High School in Freehold, where she is completing the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme. She is Senior-Editor-in-Chief of her school newspaper, *The Helix*, and an active member of National Honor Society and Technology Student Association. She volunteers her time teaching the Hindi language to young kids at her local middle school, and also participates in food packaging drives by the organization *Rise Against Hunger*. She is president of the student-run tutoring program *HeadStart Monmouth*, which offers free virtual high school level prep classes to middle and high school students in New Jersey. Anika looks forward to remaining an active member of her community in college as well.

Madelyn Sanchez-Berra is a senior at Red Bank Regional High School studying in the Academy of Engineering. She is a member of the National Honor Society and started wrestling in her junior year. Madelyn advocates for her community by serving as the secretary of the *RBR Dreamers* and as a representative on the Student Advisory Board. Madelyn helps her community by volunteering in *Lunch Break's* food pantry and helping with events such as the Backpack and Toy Giveaways. She has also spent countless hours shelving books at the Red Bank Public Library.

YMCA MLK HUMAN DIGNITY AWARD HONOREE

SUZANNE DYER

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PARKER FAMILY HEALTH CENTER



Suzanne Dyer joined Parker Center in December 2019. She currently is the Board Co-Chair of the Greater Newark Conservancy, and serves on the Borden Foundation Board, the Red Bank Y Advisory Council of the YMCA of Greater Monmouth County, the Planning Committee of the National Association of Free Clinic, and the Leadership Council of the Monmouth / Ocean Health Alliance. Suzy joined the Parker Family Health Center from Planned Parenthood of Northern, Central and Southern New Jersey where her roles included Chief Philanthropic, Legal & Regulatory Affairs Officer; and most recently Chief Legal Affairs & Compliance Officer. Previously, Suzy was an Assistant US Attorney in the District of New Jersey. Prior to that she was an associate in the commercial litigation and bankruptcy departments at Winston & Strawn LLC in New York, NY. She received her law degree from St. John's University School of Law and her undergraduate degree from Trinity College in Hartford, CT.

YMCA SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AWARD HONOREE

RITESH SHAH, RPH

FOUNDER/TRUSTEE, RITESH SHAH CHARITABLE PHARMACY



Ritesh Shah is CEO/Managing Partner of Legacy Pharmacy Group, one of the tri-state area's largest GPO independent pharmacies. As an independent pharmacy owner, he is committed to delivering first-rate care to patients by educating them on control mechanisms for chronic diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

His extensive record of philanthropy and service to the Monmouth County community includes serving as the Patient Education Chair of Bayshore Senior Center; working

to stem the opioid crisis and addiction epidemic through GenerationRx in schools; conducting seminars and educating the public and healthcare professionals on diabetes, medication management and other topics.

Shah is a registered Pharmacist. He currently resides in Freehold, New Jersey with his wife, Asha, who is also a pharmacist, and his children, Sarthak and Krina.

CONGRATULATIONS

2024 YMCA AWARD HONOREES

for modeling the important mission of Dr. King
in service to community.



YMCA TOGETHERHOOD® CHAMPION AWARD HONOREE

KELLY ELLIS-FOSTER

COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER



Kelly Ellis-Foster and her family have been actively involved in the Old Bridge YMCA since the doors opened. Kelly's husband John worked on that first day and was the beloved Aquatics Director. Her children Alexander and Caitlin were lifeguards, swim instructors, Old Bridge High School swimmers, and Caitlin, a FOBY swimmer. Kelly has been a member of the Old Bridge Y Advisory Council since its inception, where she is the Togetherhood liaison and occasionally makes an appearance to work out!

For 30 years, Kelly worked for Honeywell, Inc. in a wide range of HR positions, retiring as the Global Director, Communications for Organizational Development and Learning. She is now an independent consultant helping organizations make successful changes and build stronger teams. In addition to her Togetherhood work, Kelly has been an active volunteer in Old Bridge for the last 20 years. She has been a Cub Scout and Girl Scout Leader, a member of the Old Bridge Marching Knights Band Parents Association, Co-Chair of the Old Bridge Relay for Life, and Founder of the Old Bridge Glass Slipper, a 501(c)3 that provides prom and formal apparel at no charge to students in the area.

Kelly served on the Old Bridge Town Council for a short time and two terms on the Old Bridge Board of Education, holding positions as Vice-President and President. She remains active in supporting district events and organizations.

SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

ANIKA SAMIR AJGAONKAR

BIOTECHNOLOGY HIGH SCHOOL



"Hey, dog-eater! Throw the bottle back here!"

The air buzzed with snickers as a small Asian boy at the front of the school bus looked behind warily at a group of boys in the back. The metal bottle they had thrown, narrowly missing his head, now rolled on the dusty floor as the bus swerved, hitting the wall with a hard clang!

Middle schoolers are vicious, I thought, watching silently. As a high schooler taking the "late" bus after a club meeting, I just wanted a quiet journey home. It was too late for that now.

"Yo, chink! Didn't you hear me? Turn your Asian a** around!"

"Heh, he's pretending not to hear. Seems like his ears are even smaller than his eyes."

I'd heard enough. I turned around, staring daggers at them, and contemplated demanding them to stop. But would they care? Their "target" wasn't engaging, so stepping in might aggravate the situation. I glared back before looking away.

Suddenly, my forehead rammed into the seat in front as something blunt struck the back of my head. Pain bloomed above the nape of my neck and my vision blurred, while frenzied laughter resounded yet again. As I blinked away tears and looked down, I saw my assailant's weapon: someone's filthy sneaker.

"Whatcha lookin' at, curryhead?" a boy snickered.

My face and neck flushed—with embarrassment, rage, pain, or maybe all three—and I rushed off the bus at my stop as I felt tears welling up in my eyes.

I trudged down the sidewalk, head throbbing. *How long has he been dealing with this?* I wondered, quietly sobbing.

As a writer, the only power I knew I could wield was through my words. If their cruel language could tear others down, I'd use mine to help. I resolved to communicate what I had witnessed to the school.

That night, with my parents' support, I emailed my recollection of the events to the middle school guidance counselors. They replied the next morning, praising my "bravery" for reaching out and assuring me they'd launch an investigation. But guiltily, I wondered whether I would have done so if I hadn't gotten involved, whether I would've been a bystander to someone's pain. **No**, I insisted, **I would have done the same.**

Days later, after the same club meeting, I was boarding the bus when I noticed the small Asian boy in his usual seat. I sat down next to him, smiling.

"Hi, I'm Anika. Are you okay?"

He looked down, replying, "I'm used to it. My name's Daniel, by the way. You're the girl who got hit with the shoe, right?"

"Yeah. But I'm alright now."

He fiddled with his thumbs. "I know you're the one who told the school. They all got suspended, and don't bother me as much now." Looking up at me, he said softly, "Thank you."

I grinned and asked, "I guess we're allies now, Daniel, don't you think?" "Yeah," he smiled back. "I guess we are."

SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

MADELYN SANCHEZ-BERRA

RED BANK REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL



From a young age, I had succumbed to the fact that I was different. It was never very apparent in my elementary and middle school years because I was mostly surrounded by other fellow Latinos. But when a white man falsely accused me, a naive eight year-old, of stealing his daughter's bracelet and called me a "dirty Mexican thief," it became clear that I was somehow unwanted in America, my birthplace, my home. From then on, I developed a complicated relationship with my identity and I became fully aware of the fact that my journey towards achieving my dreams would be difficult.

When I finally entered high school, I locked in to my academics and accepted every opportunity that came my way. I started volunteering at my local library and the local food pantry, I joined several clubs, I started wrestling in my junior year, and I completed two summer internships throughout high school. I was building up an impressive academic record not only to feel accomplished of myself, but also to ultimately work towards a better future for my family and I, and prove to other people that I wasn't a slacker or lazy or a thief, common stereotypes for Mexicans.

One club in particular made me feel most welcomed: the RBR Dreamers. In the Dreamers club, I felt safe, I was able to be myself, and my wildest dreams seemed to be at my grasp. I could make it into a selective school such as Cornell University and I could become an electrical engineer. My internal conflict with my identity disappeared whenever I walked into my room. I beamed with pride knowing that I am a Mexican-American, that we have some of the best food, that we are hard working and compassionate and take strength in our independence. In that classroom, I waved the Mexican flag with pride and shouted "Si se puede!" with every fiber of my being.

Then came adversity. In the summer leading up to my last year of high school, the Dreamers club advisor, Ms. Mondaca, informed me and other officers that our club could no longer be considered a club. At a school board meeting that took place on August 16, 2023, a lone vote redefined our club's status, and until another vote was taken at the subsequent meeting, our club was nothing, zilch, nada. After hearing the news, I was stunned. It wasn't like this was an unlikely situation, in fact this has happened before to the club because several parents at my school have a problem with a club that serves as a safe space for undocumented students and their allies. But I was angry because the decision reminded me of the fact that some people will never consider me as an American and therefore, I will always be viewed as something less-than. I had been doing so well, coming to have pride in my identity. And then this comes along.

But the other officers didn't let that one vote stop us. We decided to speak at the next board meeting and tell our stories in an effort to save our club.

It was September 11, 2023, and I was anxious like never before. What if people judged me? What if the board still voted against our club? What would our members do if the club was dissolved? What would I do to mend my identity?

I stepped up to the podium and angrily read the speech I had prepared. In all honesty, I blacked out and don't remember saying my speech, but I do remember how hot my cheeks felt as I recited my words and the applause that followed. I realized then that our club had a lot of support, and a couple of people who disagree would not trump over the majority. When the next vote was taken, All but two people voted to let the Dreamers continue to be a club. We had done it! The RBR Dreamers were saved! The officers and I, along with our supporters, cried tears of joy. We had finally been acknowledged.

For most of my life, I have felt out of place in the world, never feeling Mexican enough or American enough. But this challenge that I was presented with strengthened my confidence in my identity as a Latina, and I feel more welcomed in the spaces I take up. I am a proud Latina who will always stand up for what is right.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

DR. MAYSA AKBAR, PHD, ABPP

CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICER | CHIEF OF PSYCHOLOGY IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST, AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Maysa (MY-SA) Akbar is a respected scientist-practitioner and APA's Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) and Chief of Psychology in the Public Interest (CPP). She is charged with infusing equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) into the fabric of the association's work. As the leading architect of APA's evolving EDI framework, Dr. Akbar works with APA staff, leaders, and members to refine and build consensus for an overall plan, operationalize its goals and establish metrics to monitor and ensure progress. The CDO also serves as a spokesperson and advocate for EDI in the field of psychology, both within and outside the association. Before assuming her position with the APA, she was the founder and chief executive officer of a clinical practice based in New Haven, Connecticut, which specialized in race-based trauma. She created a consulting firm and educational network focused on organizational cultural transformation. Her firm delivered cutting-edge programs anchored in EDI to city governments, public schools and, court systems, among other entities. Dr. Akbar's areas of specialty include racial identity development, racism, urban trauma and, allyship, topics on which she has authored research articles, books, and book chapters. Dr. Akbar is an experienced instructor and master trainer in EDI for both the medical and the broader community.



FOR A UNITED US.

The Y is here for all.

Learn about our commitment to justice, equity, diversity and inclusion.



» ymcanj.org/jedi