

The Star-Ledger

Wednesday, June 29, 2005

All Stars shine on the youth of Newark

Performing arts site on target for 2007

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Newark children are one step closer to having a youth performing arts and learning center, now that the All Stars Project New Jersey has raised more than \$1 million toward the project.

The nonprofit youth development organization crossed the \$1 million mark in its five-year, \$5 million expansion campaign, president Gabrielle Kurlander said yesterday. A New Jersey businessman, who chooses to remain anonymous, donated \$450,000.

The funds would expand the current All Stars program in New Jersey and also fund a center, which would be located in downtown Newark, Kurlander said. The center would be modeled after one that was opened in 2003 on 42nd Street in New York City that houses three theaters, rehearsal studios, classrooms and youth program facilities.

Young people from ages 5 to 25 would be able to use the center, to be named the "New-

ark All Stars Center for Youth Development," free of charge. She anticipated an opening date sometime in 2007.

Gloria Strickland, director of the All Stars Project in New Jersey, would be the center's director.

"She's an expert in the performance approach to learning," Kurlander said.

Strickland said that because of All Stars, thousands of Newark's poorest children have thrived in theater and development programs in their neighborhoods.

"It's really making a difference in the lives of Newark's young people," Strickland said.

The All Stars project currently serves 1,000 Newark kids each year and hopes to double that figure, said Kurlander.

Kurlander said youngsters from poor communities are usually not exposed to enrichment programs such as camps or family vacations -- activities that teach about the world -- so

programs such as the All Stars Talent Show, in which kids produce and perform on weekends, fill that gap.

Another All Stars program for ages 16 to 21, the Developmental School for Youth, brings youth to corporations to learn from and mingle with business leaders.

"It enriches their lives and teaches them about the business world," Kurlander said.

The All Stars serves 10,000 inner-city youngsters in seven cities each year, said Kurlander, and teaches young people theater and other performance techniques that help them develop as learners and leaders.

"There's a tremendous need around the country," she said.

In areas that some consider bleak, hopeless, forgotten, where children's test scores are the lowest, that's where All Stars will make a home, said Kurlander.

"It's about changing the lives of young people, one child at a time," she said.