



Minister Sylvia Coleman leads the Macedonia Baptist Church Youth Choir during their Gospelfest audition held at the McDonald's on Route 66 in Neptune on Friday evening.

THOMAS P. COSTELLO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

# GOSPEL

## 'THE SOUL FEELING GOOD'

Dozens of N.J. performers vie for a spot in Newark event

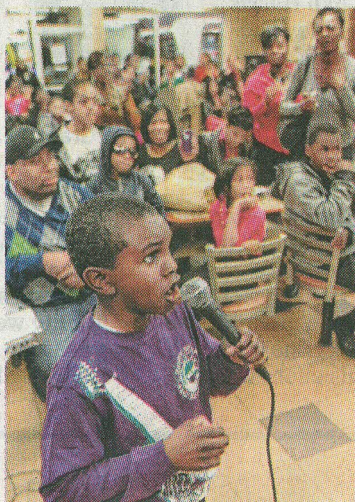
By Nancy Shields  
Staff Writer

NEPTUNE — The Route 66 McDonald's was still doing business as a restaurant Friday night but it also was a setting of musical inspiration as singers, rappers and poets auditioned for McDonald's Gospelfest 2012.

Dozens of solo and group acts tried out before A. Curtis Farrow, the show's producer and director for 13 years. Farrow and his team have been holding auditions steadily at McDonald's restaurants in the greater New York area since Jan. 21.

The 29th annual Gospelfest is to be held on Mother's Day, May 12, at the Prudential Center in Newark.

Early in the evening, the large crowd of participants and their families rose to their feet for 8-year-old Keith Bella-



Keith Bellamy, 8, Asbury Park, sings during his Gospelfest audition at the McDonald's on Route 66 in Neptune on Friday.

THOMAS P. COSTELLO/  
STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

my of Asbury Park, who is blind since birth and who sang "Feeling Like Giving God the Glory."

"He can sing," his mother, Tanaya Laing, said, with obvious pride just before he began.

Pamela Luke of Asbury Park set an early high standard with her singing, and Bob Farley from Neptune entertained with jokes.

### MORE ONLINE

Visit [APP.com](http://APP.com) and search "Gospelfest" for a video of the auditions.

When Deborah White of Neptune sang "Without God I Would Be Nothing," Farrow signaled to the pianist to take her up a little higher so he could hear her full range.

Minister Sylvia Coleman of Macedonia Baptist Church in Neptune led 42 of her youth singers through two crowd-pleasing gospel songs and then watched her granddaughter, 4-year-old Na'Ziyah Walton sing "Lord I'm Available to You."

Farrow said he auditioned performers aged 2 to 94 during the past week. Counting tapes and CDs submitted besides live tryouts, he said he would hear 40,000 people and would pick 62 acts — a total of 2,000 people — for the show.

Gospelfest began when

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