

SchoolScene

Township man's life story serves as example to pupils

BY JONATHAN RIFKIN
Staff Writer

When Paul Wichansky spoke at the Lafayette Mills School in Manalapan last week, he qui-

eted a room filled with third- and fourth-graders.

However, his greatest feat while discussing the challenges he faces living with cerebral palsy was how he muted his au-

dience's thoughts of fear and pity and replaced them with a sense of awe and admiration.

"Every time you look at the word 'disability,' separate the first three letters," the 30-year-old Freehold Township resident said. "Everyone has that. I want you to get over your own disability, even if it's not physical like mine."

Since the age of 10, Wichansky has been giving inspirational talks to students all over the country. However, for the last year he has been working through "A Vision in Motion: Motivational Speakers Bureau," headed by Jay Gittleton, company president.

MANALAPAN
Wichansky, a doctoral candidate at Rutgers University who is training to be a meteorologist, said he has been speaking to Lafayette Mills students annually for the past seven years and also talks at middle schools and high schools in the area.

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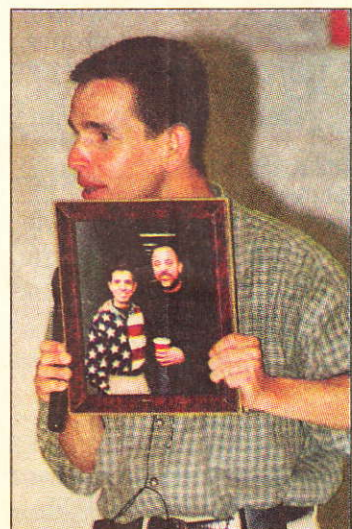
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Paul Wichansky, a motivational speaker, talks to a fourth-grade class at Lafayette Mills School. He discussed taking the "dis" out of disability. (PHOTO: BRUCE COTTRELL)





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His varied stories of learning how to walk, relating to peers while growing up and tirelessly pushing himself to follow his dreams and goals is presented with endless enthusiasm and energy. Stories about his childhood gave students insight into Wichansky's "can do" attitude.

"When I was young, I couldn't walk," he said. "I went to the supermarket with my parents and I would fall down a lot. It's common nature for a parent to want to pick up their child, but my dad said, 'Don't.' That's when I began to understand the idea of getting up on my own."

Students were obviously impressed by Wichansky's tale, but during the question-and-answer period after the program, questions probed how someone obviously different from his peers avoided ridicule.

"I wasn't teased very much," Wichansky said. "I had a big smile on my face all the time. People wouldn't tease you if you're smiling."

Students also seemed to respond well to props Wichansky displayed, including a video of himself skydiving and a painting he created of a sporty car.

"I was very impressed and felt he was very brave to go through all of this," 10-year-old Aaron Mayer said.