

The Round Table



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LaBanca's Research Program Brings Honor to SHS

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When news spread across the school that Frank LaBanca had been nominated for the Connecticut Education Association Teacher of the Year Award, few people were surprised. As an energetic and active member of the teaching staff, Mr. LaBanca made countless contributions to the school community, and has become a favorite among students at Stamford high. His hard work and dedication ultimately earned him a spot as one of

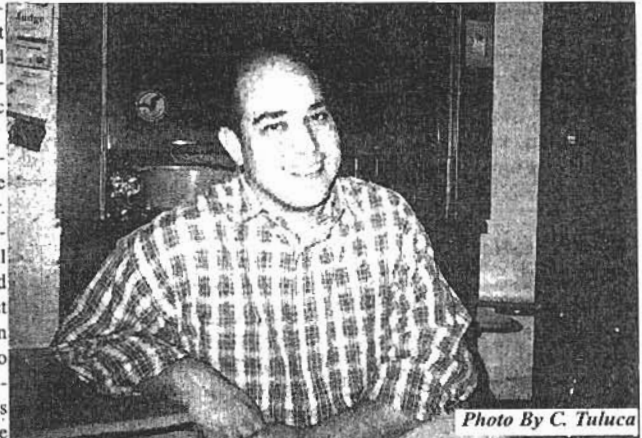
the top five finalists for Teacher of the Year, and brought recognition to his passion, his teaching skills and his innovative programs.

The process of being nominated for Teacher of the Year can be a tedious one, but LaBanca took on the challenge with little fuss. As part of the application process, he wrote several essays about teaching, traveled to Hartford for panel interviews, and answered many questions about his teaching philosophy, the community he works in, and the innovative efforts he has made as a teacher. "It really all boils down to my research program here at the school," said LaBanca, remarking on why he is

repeatedly honored for his teaching efforts. "It's something that very few other schools offer, and it gives students a great opportunity to explore the field of scientific research."

The program is an independent research program under the complete direction of Mr. LaBanca. Students are responsible for selecting an experimental research topic and designing and carrying out experiments. Most students work under the direction of the teacher-mentor and also have field mentors from local universities and industries. Projects are designed to take place over the course of the academic year, and students often spend time outside of their assigned class periods to conduct experiments in the field. All students are required to present their results at a state science symposium or fair, which motivates them to work hard on their projects and make them impressive to the public.

Though it has only been an active program at the school for the past several years, it just recently became offered as a research class in addition to an after school program. The research program has already produced major successes for its participants. Igor Zelenberg received the honor this year of being a Siemens Westinghouse National Semifinalist, a huge honor in the world of student science. Other program participants have earned awards on the state and regional



Mr. LaBanca, science teacher at Stamford High, was one of the top five finalists for the Connecticut Teacher of the Year Award.

levels, proving the young program to be an early success.

"The research program is really a great thing," says junior Brian Thurm, who has been working with LaBanca on a research project for the past two years. "LaBanca is really dedicated to it, and he helps us to get the most out of it. I've learned a lot through my research, and I've had a lot of fun doing it."

While he says that he gets great joy from inspiring the kids in his program, student satisfaction is not the only reward for LaBanca. Over the last several years, he has also been named a Radio Shack National Teacher, a GTE G.I.F.T. (Growth Initiative For Teachers) Fellow, the Connecticut Science Fair Board of Directors' Outstanding Teacher of

Science Fair Students, has been awarded a National Education Association Innovation Grant (which he is currently using for his research program), and has been invited to travel with delegates from the Connecticut Science Fair as the lead teacher to the National Science Fair. With all of these honors, Mr. LaBanca serves as one of the more decorated teachers on the Stamford High staff.

"He works hard, is passionate about his job, and passes his excitement on to his students," said senior AP Biology student Israella Nof. "I'm not surprised he has earned all of his honors. He's a great guy, and one of the best teachers I've ever had. What can I say? He deserves it."

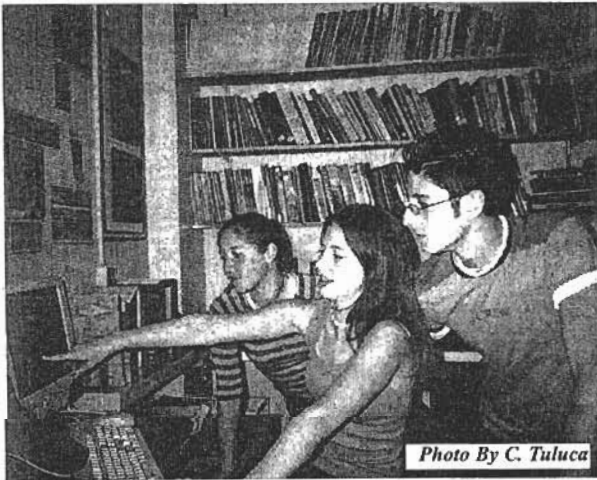


Photo By C. Tuluca

Students in LaBanca's research class work on their personal research project. The research program has brought much attention and prestige to Stamford High's Science department.