

Science instructor achieves Teacher of Year award

By **Brian Saxton**
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NEWTOWN — Science, says Frank LaBanca, is for everyone.

"I can't imagine any job that wouldn't find science useful," the 32-year-old biology teacher at Newtown High School said last week.

After a decade of teaching, LaBanca, who was inspired to pursue science during his own high school days, has been named Connecticut's "Teacher of the Year" by the Meriden-based Teachers' Insurance Plan.

LaBanca got \$1,000 and the school received a check for \$500. With the state award, LaBanca now qualifies for the company's "National Teacher of the Year" title to be decided later this month.

Thomas Kuroski, chairman of the high school science department, nominated LaBanca for the award and said LaBanca had made "a significant impact" on the unit.

LaBanca joined the faculty at Newtown High School two years ago after teaching in Stamford for eight years.

"He has quickly become a model and mentor teacher for the department," Kuroski said. "Mr. LaBanca's students are regularly involved in hands-on laboratory activities. His laboratory is constantly abuzz with activity."

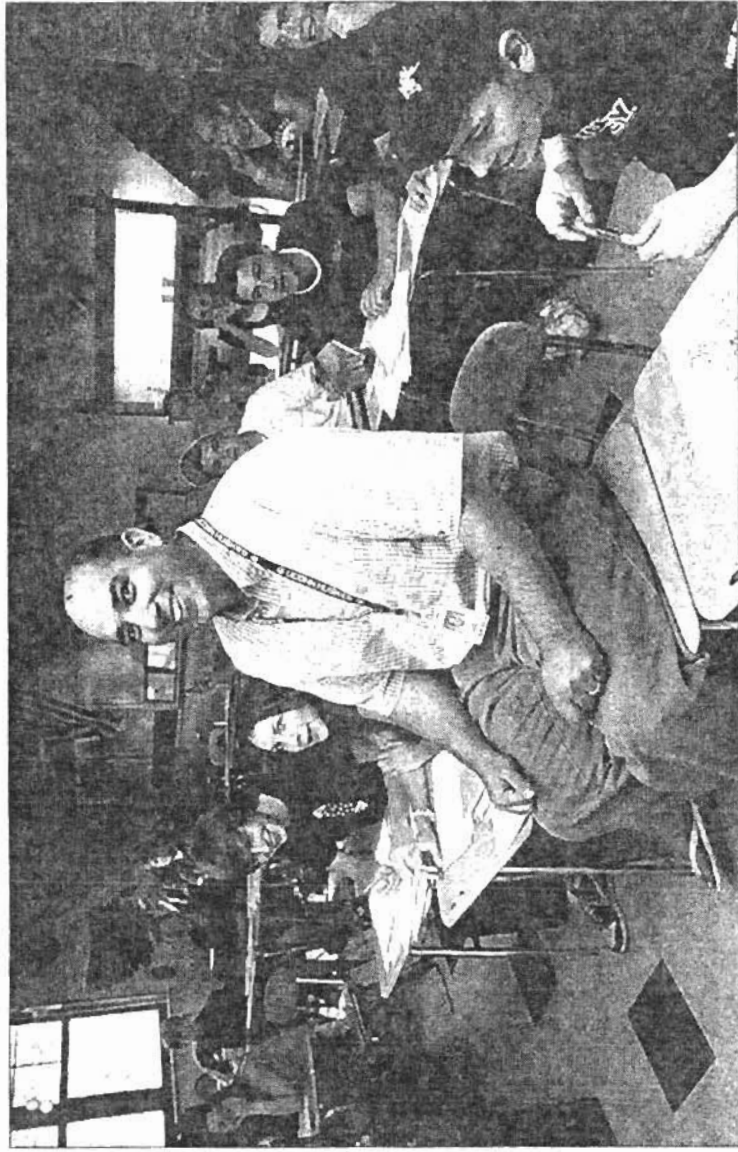
LaBanca's projects have included making local river water quality studies in partnership with the state Department of Environmental Protection. DEP officials have also visited the school to work with students on other classroom programs.

Kuroski said LaBanca had implemented a science research program at the school that provides students with opportunities to complete independent research.

"These students have conducted original, significant projects and have been extremely successful," Kuroski said.

During the past year, students have competed in both the Connecticut State Science Fair and the Connecticut and National Junior Science and Humanities Symposium.

"I think it's important for students to find creative ways of seeking independent solutions," said LaBan-



The News-Times/Carol Kaliff
Newtown High School biology teacher Frank LaBanca has been named Connecticut's "Teacher of the Year" by the Teachers' Insurance Plan.

ca. LaBanca, once named the RadioShack National Teacher for Excellence in Science, Math and Technology, has also been a finalist for both the Connecticut Education Association Teacher of the Year award and Connecticut's Outstanding Biology Teacher Award.

"He's a very outgoing guy," said 17-year-old Bobby Grauer, who will graduate from Newtown this year and plans to study natural science at Lyndon State College, Md.

Grauer said LaBanca once mentored him in a study of shellfish in Long Island Sound. "He'll reach out and help you any time," Grauer said. "All the students love him. He makes the work environment very relaxed."

LaBanca, who lives in Newtown with his wife and two daughters, Ann 3, and Maggie, 1, said he had always been fascinated by the "logic" of science. "I think it's important to make students practicing scientists even if they never become scientists," LaBanca said. "It will expose them to the logical way of recognizing problems and finding ways of resolving them."

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