

# Community Reporter

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The new Jersey Fresh seafood logo.

## Hooked on 'Jersey Fresh' seafood

By KIRK MOORE  
Staff Writer

POINT PLEASANT BEACH — The launch of an expanded branding and marketing campaign for New Jersey seafood underlined a close relationship between the commercial fishing industry and the state Department of Agriculture — a partnership that fishermen see threatened by budget turmoil in Trenton.

"We may not plant seeds, but we do harvest," said James Lovgren of the Fishermen's Dock Cooperative here, a group that was instrumental in bringing fishermen together with the Department of Agriculture and New Jersey Farm Bureau nearly 30 years ago. So captains are alarmed at proposals to shutter the department and transfer missions to the Department of Environmental Protection.

Since the 1980s, fishermen have, in fact, argued for giving agriculture officials jurisdiction over the \$146 million seafood industry, said fisherman Jimmy Harry, a participant in those early discussions. While Gov. Corzine has recently acknowledged that the farm bureaucracy probably won't be dismantled to save money, Harry and Lovgren say this could be a good time to renew their suggestion to transfer more fishing regulation the other way — into the Agriculture Department.

"DEP is a regulatory agency. Department of Agriculture helps us," Lovgren said at an April 22 news conference with state Agriculture Secretary Charles M. Kuperus, announcing the Jersey Seafood campaign.

"This is not just an advertising program," Kuperus said to onlookers crowded at the co-op market counter. The goal is to label approved fish as sustainably harvested species so they become "a value-added product in the marketplace. ... It's harvested by a local fisherman or (fish) farmer, and it has a high level of quality," Kuperus said.

Operating under the aegis

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# School's out

## St. Thomas Christian to close grades 1 through 8

By KEITH RUSCITTI  
Staff Writer

BRICK — St. Thomas Christian Academy's board of trustees has decided to eliminate its first-through eighth-grade curriculum when the school year concludes in June.

However, academy officials said the school's prekindergarten and kindergarten programs would continue.

Citing decreasing enrollment as the primary factor, Robert Sanger, the academy's executive director, said the administration was trying until this week to find a way to continue its grade-school curriculum.

"We were still trying to figure out a way to continue up until (April 21)," Sanger said. "It just wasn't feasible due to the enrollment being lower than we expected."

The academy gained notoriety in November 2005, when it, along with the St. Thomas Lutheran Church and its parent organization Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, were named in a lawsuit alleging that former pastor of the church, Rev. Robert L. Slegel, molested children between 1967 and 1985.

There are 21 plaintiffs involved in the lawsuit, which is still pending, according to Toms River attorney Robert R. Fuggi Jr., who filed the suit that seeks \$5 million in damages for each plaintiff.

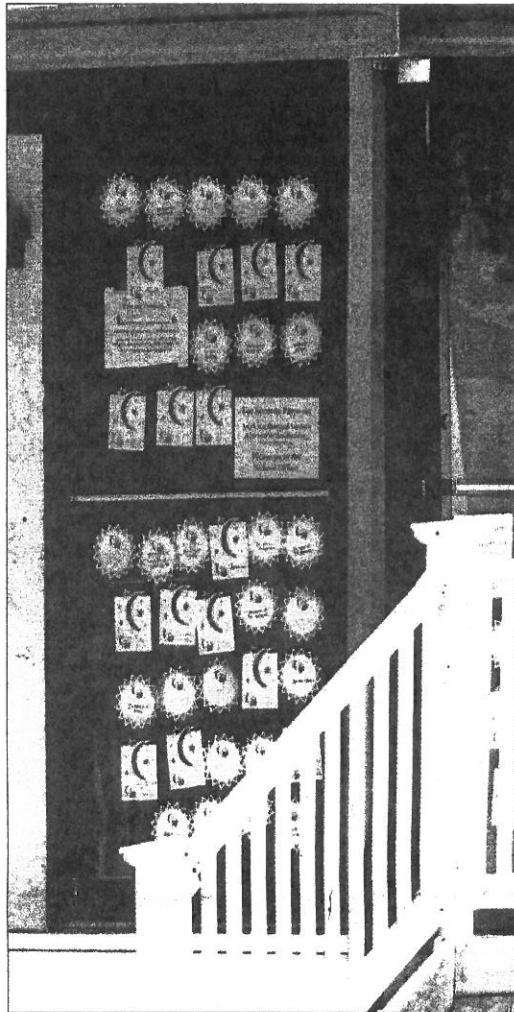
Slegel resigned in 1993 and eventually died in 2006. His widow, Cynthia Slegel, who once was principal of the academy, and the Rev. John M. Elstad, a onetime associate pastor of the church under Slegel, also are named in the lawsuit.

Elstad was named pastor when Slegel resigned amid scandal in 1993.

"There was absolutely no discussion about that lawsuit. This was strictly a business matter," Harold McAvoy, vice president of school's board of trustees, said Wednesday.

In an April 21 information session held with parents at the church, Cathi Parry, president of the board of trustees, announced the drastic steps school officials would take.

In a 30-minute presentation, Parry answered questions from the parents in attendance about the school's fate.



Staff photos by Michael Sypniewsk

In recent times, St. Thomas Christian Academy's (top) budget continued to show a deficit, but an official said the Academy officials said the doors to the school's prekindergarten and kindergarten programs would remain open.

She said the budget continued to show a deficit, but the school would have a enough money to pay its bills through remainder of the school year.

The board of trustees said people who posted a deposit toward next year's tuition would receive their money back by next week.

Sanger said the school will continue to host and operate its summer camp program, which begins June 23. But the board of trustees said 25 children would need to enroll in the summer camp in order to make it profitable. As of this week, eight children had signed up for the summer program.

There are 92 students enrolled at the academy, ranging from prekindergarten through eighth grade. But that number of students is well below what administrators expected, according to its three-year

strategic plan released last spring.

The plan estimated the school needed 110 students enrolled this year to achieve financial stability. It called for a 10 percent increase in enrollment each year after.

But as of Monday, only 44 students had registered for next year, according to Sanger.

Parents affiliated with the school were saddened by the announcement at a Monday meeting attended by about 40 people.

At the regularly scheduled PTO meeting Tuesday, parents discussed the loss of friendships and educational alternatives, according to PTO Treasurer Dennis Pfefferkorn of Toms River.

"I wasn't that surprised, because I knew they had a problem with enrollment," said Pfefferkorn, who

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## Board gets second chance to reduce the school budget

By TRISTAN J. SCHWEIGER  
Staff Writer

BRICK — The Township Council has requested the Board of Education make cuts to the school budget before presenting it formally to the council last this month, council members said this week.

Brick voters overwhelmingly rejected the proposed \$141,104,370 budget in the school board elections April 15. Typically, a budget defeat means the council will then review the budget, decide what and whether to cut, and then send the revised budget on to the county schools superintendent for final approval.



Brick Mayor Stephen Acropolis

But Councilman Brian DeLuca, a former Board of Education president, said the council wants input from the three new board members elected last month. Vicky Leone and Michael J. Pifko defeated incumbent board members Dan Rosa and Frank Pannucci for three-year terms, and Kim Terebush defeated incumbent Ed McBride for a one-year term on the Board of Education.

"The reason why we're sending it back to the board is because there were three new candidates who were selected, and through their campaign process, they had a lot of fresh, new ideas," DeLuca said. "We're hoping that they can give us the cuts that are needed."

DeLuca said the process would help the council avoid hiring an auditor to look at the budget, which Brick has done in the past. That generally costs between \$10,000 and \$15,000, DeLuca said.

DeLuca, Councilman Dan Toth and Councilman Michael Thulen will meet with the Board of Education to discuss cuts before the board brings the revised budget before the full Township Council.

Board of Education member Cynthia McCarthy said she agreed with the council that the new board members might bring fresh insight as to how the proposed budget could be revised. "They won the election, so they should have the opportunity," McCarthy said.

However, Pifko said crafting the revised budget

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