**OCEAN COUNTY  
EDITION**

## Lakewood school tab cut \$7.63M

By ZACH PATBERG  
TOMS RIVER BUREAU

BOARD LEADER: Blasts colleagues as 'sell-outs'



**LAKWOOD** — Not even taking the board presidency could give Leonard Thomas political muscle.

On Tuesday, the only remaining parent of public school students on the township Board of Education had been optimistic that his colleagues would vote later that evening for a compromise between fis-

cal restraint and district funding.

By Wednesday, Thomas had a different outlook.

"Last night made it painfully obvious to me that there's a campaign going on that has no regard for the public school system — in fact, there's a move to decimate it," he said.

The outcome of Tuesday's marathon meeting — which triggered a reeling, newly appointed board President Thomas to walk out, return and call the board "a bunch of sell-outs" — left the district facing the harshest cuts possible as its budget heads to the Township

Committee for approval today.

The tax levy will be slashed by \$7.63 million, bringing an initial 11-percent tax rate increase to zero and some services to bare bones for six schools already failing by state standards. Up to 40 positions could be elimi-

nated, meaning almost certainly larger classes, and 170,370 less will go toward supplies, despite a parental outcry this year over a textbook shortage.

Lakewood residents no doubt saw it coming. A ticket of three board candidates running on a promise of a zero tax increase swept the school elections in April.

See **Lakewood**, Page A2**NATION  
& WORLD****HEADING  
TO THE HILL**

Elena Kagan begins meeting with senators at the Capitol amid rumblings about her experience.  
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**ESCALATING  
PRICE OF WAR**

Conflict in Afghanistan has now cost more than the fighting in Iraq.  
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**LOCAL**

**EDUCATOR  
OF THE YEAR**  
Berkeley teacher wins state's top honor.  
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**STATE****NO GREAT  
FLIGHT SEEN**

NJ Transit officials say that ridership is not down significantly following rate hikes.  
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**BUSINESS**

**GASOLINE PRICES  
EXPECTED TO DROP**  
Rising supplies, concerns likely to send costs down this summer.  
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- Breaking coverage of the trial of Daniel Van Pelt
- Analysis of the cleanup plan at Oyster Creek

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## Colts Neck chemistry class comes up with a strategy for containing oil spills



STAFF PHOTOS: PETER ACKERMAN

Teacher Michelle Silverstone (center) with students in her Colts Neck High School chemistry class (from left) sophomore Ryan Queler, junior Conor Ralph, and sophomores Ryan Allmers, Joe Amato, Ross Tetro and Jon Stouber. They were challenged to study possible solutions to the Gulf of Mexico oil well leak.

## Bridging **GULF** between classroom and real world

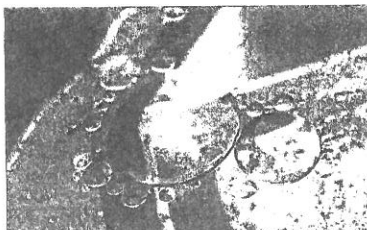
By JENNIFER BRADSHAW  
EDUCATION WRITER

**COLTS NECK** — When Colts Neck High School students studied a way to mitigate the oil well leak fouling the Gulf of Mexico, their research caught the attention of some innovators and scientists.

Using regular powdered vegetable fiber, a group of six sophomore and junior students in Michelle Silverstone's class created "Fight Fire with Fiber," a plan that would not stop the leak but that could contain the oil and keep it from spreading farther along coastlines.

Silverstone decided to use the oil spill as a learning exercise.

Since an April 20 explosion of an offshore



A close-up view of the oil-in-water experiment. Students found that sprinkling vegetable fiber along the edge of their sample clumped the oil and kept it off the "coast."

or 210,000 gallons of oil a day have been leaking into the Gulf. Several efforts to plug the leak have failed.

"I explained to the students, 'I want you guys to use your knowledge of chemistry, your basic knowledge, to separate oil from water,'" she

After starting the project on a Monday, the fiber solution was discovered two days later.

Silverstone said she submitted the plans, along with four other solutions, to the Environmental Protection Agency and the Federal

Agency. She also sent the project to InnoCentive, a Texas-based company that solicits problem-solving ideas, and has issued a call for submissions specific to the spill via its website.

After only one hour, she received a response from InnoCentive wanting to know more about the students' idea.

InnoCentive has advised that the variables of the sea — wind, currents, and wildlife — may render the fiber solution ineffective. But the educational value of the project will not be lost if it does not work.

"If it doesn't (work) and doesn't go any further, I'll just be satisfied that my kids have proposed a great idea," Silverstone said.

## Van Pelt trial **Ethics counsel not told of client**

By ERIK LARSEN  
STAFF WRITER

**TRENTON** — The state Legislature's ethics counsel, who then-Assemblyman Daniel M. Van Pelt turned to for advice about legislators doing consulting work, testified Wednesday that Van Pelt never told her that he had left an Atlantic City steakhouse with \$10,000 in a doggie bag from a purported developer.

If he had, she would certainly have advised him that it was a bad idea, she said.

The defense had suggested that First Assistant Legislative Counsel Marci Levin Hochman would be the linchpin in their case, even as an unwilling witness. Accompanied by an aide and under federal subpoena, Hochman walked into the courtroom just before lunch with Van Pelt's ethics file in hand to testify on his behalf in his ongoing corruption trial. Instead, she ended up testifying to the benefit of the federal government.

Van Pelt has argued that the \$10,000 from undercover FBI informant Solomon Dwek was a legitimate consulting fee and not a bribe, as the U.S. Attorney's Office has charged. He contends Hochman had advised him that he could do consulting with certain caveats attached.

Hochman said that was not true. She explained Van Pelt did telephone her for advice on Feb. 23, 2009, but that unbeknownst to her, less than 48 hours had passed since he accepted the cash. During their call, all of Van Pelt's questions had been hypotheticals.

"He specifically said he did not have any clients," Hochman said from the witness stand. "There would have been a whole other process that would need to take place" if he had.