

Man uses humor to talk to students about cerebral palsy

By **MARK D. MAROTTA**
Staff Writer

TOWAMENCIN — During a student incentive assembly at North Montco Technical Career Center Wednesday, motivational speaker Paul Stuart Wichansky used humor to stress the importance of keeping a positive attitude in order to reach one's goals.

The 36-year-old from Freehold, N.J., said the fact he was standing in front of the students was a dream come true.

Wichansky explained that he has a disability.

"It's called cerebral palsy," he said.

Wichansky said his brain was damaged when he was born, and his legs became twisted because his muscles were so weak. He was unable to walk until he was 7.

Several doctors Wichansky's mother took him to said he would never be

able to walk. But one physician with a more positive attitude said it might be possible, although it would take years.

Wichansky said he was always falling down after he learned to walk. His mother wanted to pick him up, but his father told him to get up on his own. Wichansky said his father was trying to give him independence.

When he was 18, Wichansky said, he got his driver's license. After noticing that other motorists on the road were not smiling, Wichansky put BMW emblems on his Mercury. He added that half the motorists who saw his car smiled, while the other half asked him what kind of BMW he was driving. Wichansky said he told them it was a European model.

Wichansky said that one of his dreams is to become a television meteorologist. He has earned a master's degree in meteorology

from Rutgers University and is currently a Ph.D. candidate. Wichansky said he has been attending Rutgers for 18 years.

He added that another dream was to meet musician Billy Joel. A video Wichansky showed included a picture of him with both Joel and Elton John.

The video also included examples of paintings and drawings Wichansky made, and scenes of him skydiving and scuba diving.

He described skydiving as "exhilarating."

When he was young, Wichansky said, his favorite television show was "Knight Rider," starring Dave Hasselhoff. A six-page thank you letter Wichansky wrote to Hasselhoff is included in the actor's biography, which will be coming out in the United States in a month.

While the experiences he shared with the audience were positive, Wichansky said, he added that he was

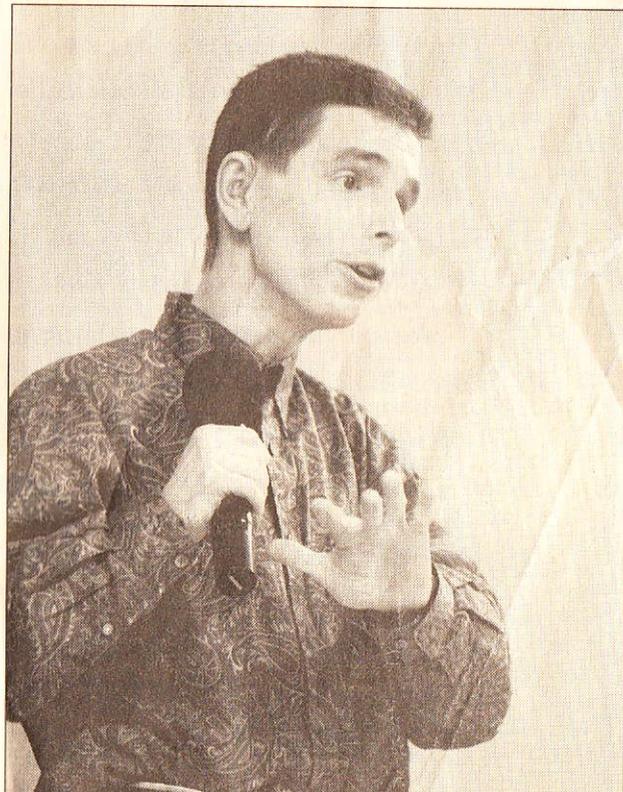
teased when he was in grade school. Teasing is like driving a nail in someone's heart, he added.

Wichansky said there is no better feeling in the world than making another person smile. He told the students he wanted them to focus on a person's capabilities, and not their disabilities.

"You are the future of this country," Wichansky said.

During another portion of the assembly, John Byrne, a junior from the Wissahickon School District, was given the President's Volunteer Service Award. A number of other students also received certificates and gift cards.

Additionally, a representative from W.W. Grainger Inc., a distributor of facilities maintenance products, presented a \$5,000 check to support the school's Partners in Excellence student incentive program.



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MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER Paul Wichansky speaks to students at the North Montco Technical Career Center.