

SCHOOLS

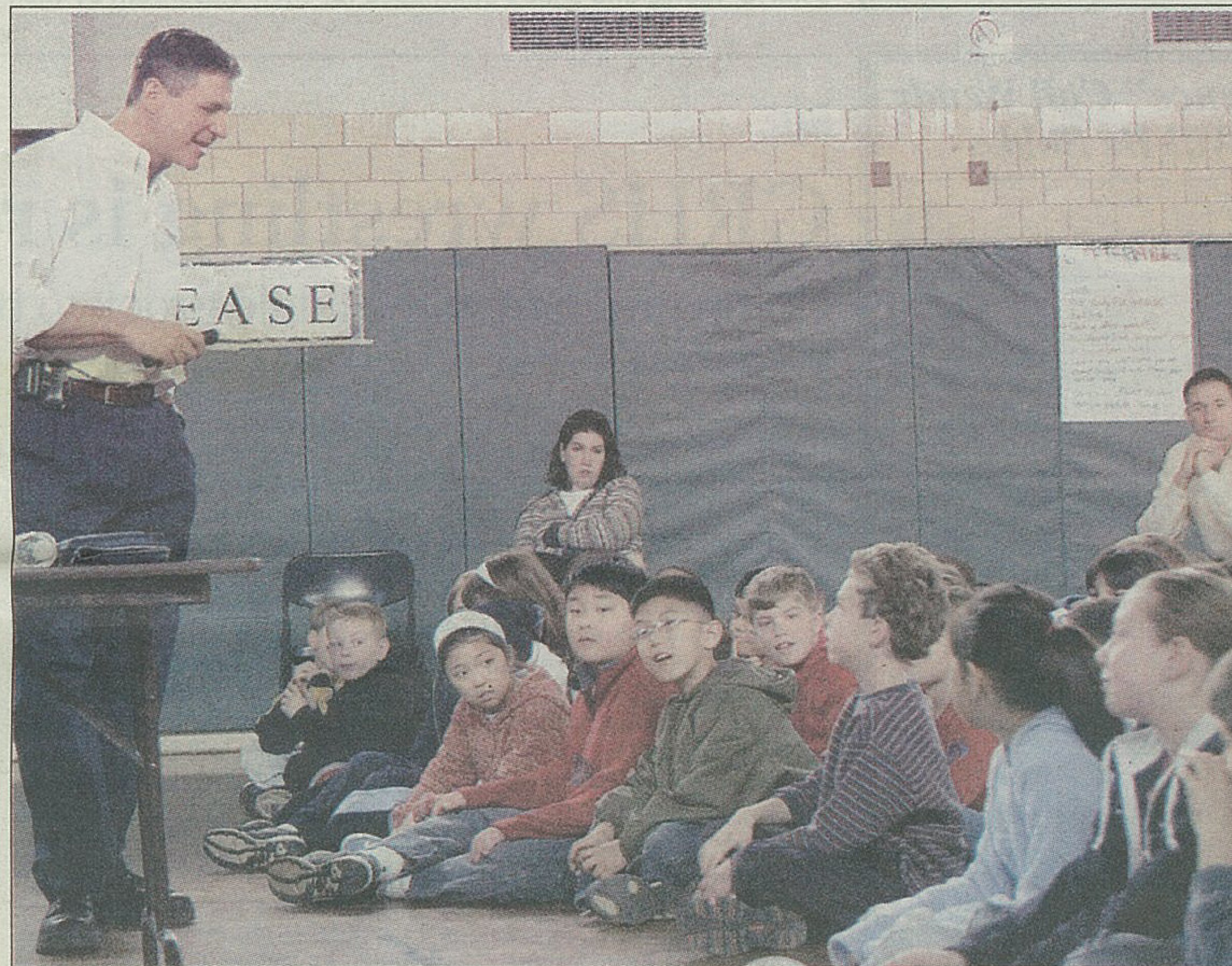
Preaching pollution prevention

BY MORGAN KORN

Staff Writer

For a child growing up in today's society, making a difference in the world, large or small, may seem improbable. But Glen Rock children are learning quite the opposite – that they can, in fact, not only alter their own living surroundings, but another ecosystem's too. By following simple, everyday principles, such as recycling paper or conserving electricity, they're helping to preserve their world and ideally, protecting it for their own children as well. That's the goal of the Stream Keeper, Dream Keeper initiative taking place in the borough schools.

In one of the hallways at Central School, a poster stands apart from the other decorations – entitled "How We Can Help the Environment." Listed are thirteen actions that are feasible for elementary school children to accomplish, as



GARY JUNG/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Robert Devita, supervisor of the River Restoration program, spoke to Hamilton school students last Monday morning about river cleanup projects at the Passaic River. Members of the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission, the agency that presents the "Messy Marvin" educational outreach program, showed movies and slide shows about the necessity to keep rivers free from pollution.

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easy as "reusing things are much as possible" and "don't waste water" to more vocally proactive actions such as "encouraging people to stop smoking" and "protesting over-developments." These messages go hand in hand with many of the teachings the students are currently learning in class.

To resident and member of the Glen Rock Environmental Commission Naomi Gamorra, the

musical group R.E.M.'s lyrics to their song "Stand" perfectly depicts the reasoning behind educating borough children about the importance of recycling.

"Stand in the place where you live...' which means realizing what's going on where you live and taking care of your environment," she said.

Gamorra followed the song's strong message, and decided to mend a problem she saw every day when walking her children to Byrd School - the deterioration of the Diamond Brook, a waterway

shared among many neighboring communities.

"I've been walking across the brook every day for five years, and I noticed it becoming eroded," she noted. "I love water, maybe because I'm a Pisces, so I wanted to do something for our environment."

Gamorra is not only trying to raise awareness of the detrimental side affects of polluting. Her drive to end local pollution resulted in the town-wide Stream Keeper, Dream Keeper program that educates children at both the elementary and high school levels about the importance of creating a clean environment. Since there are so many different environmental areas to focus on when educating the students, she said this year's goal is to teach students not to dispose of garbage in storm drains.

"Kids have no idea what the difference is between sewers and storm drains," she said. "It's unconceivable to kids that the bottle they throw on the ground washes down those drains and might end up in the Atlantic Ocean."

Gamorra cites Diamond Brook as the perfect example of an ecosystem that was pure and pristine before being polluted.

In the 1950's, the property formerly known as Opici Farms, located next to Diamond Brook, was a favorite spot for bass fishermen, Gamorra explained. "There could still be trout production in this stream, because it's almost clean at certain points," she said.

Gamorra approached Central School Principal Scott Blake about the possibility of a town-wide educational program. As the science

coordinator for all of Glen Rock's public schools, Blake said he agreed with Gamorra's request, and wanted to expand it to include the larger community.

"The teachers are definitely receptive to this program, and we're pulling all these school and town resources together ... so the program is starting to take shape," he said.

"The choices the children make affect the health of their environment and the quality of their life, and we want the children to be excited and enthusiastic about this," Blake added.

As part of the program, students in all four of the elementary schools will watch assemblies and interact in hands-on projects the week before the celebration of Earth Day on April 22, reminding children to clean up the environment - a lesson directly correlated to the school-based curriculum. This project was originally geared to the fourth grade population because their social science lessons connect so well with the project's information, said Blake.

Central fourth grade teacher Dave Hershberger teaches about various ecosystems and habitats in his curriculum, and said the students are much more enthusiastic about contributing to this subject than others.

"The students are getting hands on experience learning about ecosystems and taking care of their environments," he said. "They get involved personally with it, see it working in the school, and now know what to do to fix things."

Hershberger, an avid environmental conservationist himself,

created Central's after-school Environmental Club to further instill these important environmental lessons into the children. The idea for the club began after his students successfully recycled over 400 bottles from the school grounds in six months, to the children's delight.

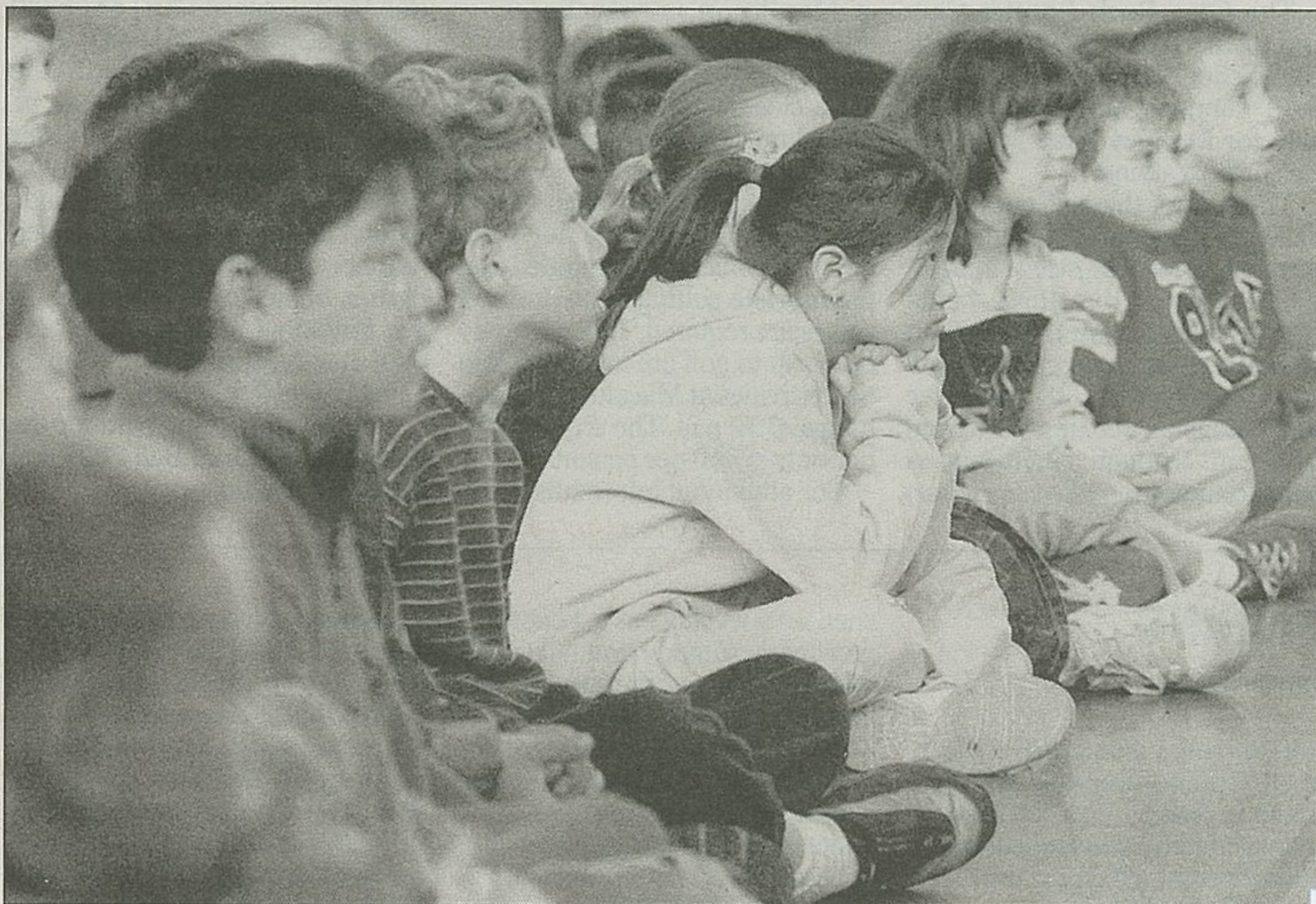
"We would keep track of the number of bottles on the blackboard," he noted. "When the children see someone littering now they will approach that person and not let he or she get away with it."

Hershberger said many of the children in the club have already been exposed to recycling from their parents, but have become more aware of doing it after the bottle project and the paper recycling undertaking at Central. Hershberger said the more teachers and parents push children at an early age to clean up after themselves, a lesser push will have to be made in future years.

"If the children don't learn now to recycle, they won't want to do it as teenagers ... It's becomes second nature," he said. "Once they're in a routine they'll be more likely to stick with it, and it'll become part of their lives - something they're connected to."

For members of the Coleman School Environmental Club, a recent trip to the Saddle River County Park in Glen Rock was more memorable than simply reading a book about the significance of recycling. Linda Franzmann, Coleman School nurse and Environmental Club advisor, led the 35 club members in cleaning

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GARY JUNG/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Hamilton School students listen intently during the "Messy Marvin" assembly held to increase children's awareness about cleaning up New Jersey rivers and streams. The "Messy Marvin" presentation is one of several planned in the district about pollution in the waters, part of the borough Stream Keeper, Dream Keeper pollution prevention initiative.