

# Lakehurst base plans academy for students

Fifth-graders to be immersed in science

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**TOMS RIVER** — Navy Lakehurst is planning to open a math and science academy for fifth-graders, designed to interest them in becoming the technological leaders the nation will need in a growing global economy.

About 850 students a year will be able to study, tuition-free, at what is being called STARBASE Lakehurst, part of a U.S. Defense Department initiative to create more interest among students to study math and science.

"China has 600,000 engineers. The U.S. has 80,000," said Jules Lewycky of the Naval Air Engineering Station at Lakehurst, who will be the program manager of the new academy.

Ocean County's freeholders said Wednesday that they support the program. That, and a spending bill to provide the money for the STARBASE, is all that is needed to get it started and ready to open by September 2009, Lewycky said.

It is expected to cost \$300,000 a year to run the academy, which will not only offer science and math education, but the disciplined example of a military base and a chance to see science applied to modern aircraft.

Engineers at the base design the complex systems that land and launch aircraft from the nation's aircraft carriers.

Lewycky said the nation is "losing its innovative edge" because other countries are producing more scientists, engineers and technicians.

He pointed to one recent study showing that American 15-year-olds ranked 27th out of 39 countries for math and science skills.

"It's a national concern," he said.

STARBASE Lakehurst will be the first of the DOD academies in New Jersey, staffed by two instructors and an administrator and supported by the engineers and scientific brain trust at the base, where 1,500 of them work.

"We wholeheartedly support it. It's a fantastic opportunity for the kids of our county," said Freeholder Gerry P. Little.

The only cost to local school districts for sending students to STARBASE will be transportation.

Once there, students will spend a total of 25 hours in the classroom. They will study one day a week, for five weeks. That way, 28 classes can be accommodated at the academy, which will operate all year, Lewycky explained.

"It will light a fire in a great number of students," predicted Freeholder Director Joseph H. Vicari, superintendent of schools in Berkeley.