



Staff photos by Tim Hawk

Italian teacher Joseph Cannavo tosses a bean bag to pick a student during a number game at Walter Hill School in Swedesboro, one of a growing number of schools to teach Italian.

## Italian: Language catching on here

(Continued from Page A-1) is also offered at Clearview Regional's evening adult school programs.

Cannavo, an instructor at Swedesboro-Woolwich, said the movement toward more Italian education programs has grown over the past decade out of the state Department of Education's 1996 core curriculum standards. Included in the standards was a provision that the community could have a say in what world languages are taught locally.

"When word began to leak out in these heavy Italian-American communities like Swedesboro-Woolwich and Gibbstown that they had a say, it just started to snowball from that point," Cannavo said.

Grass-roots community efforts and grant funding available to districts have helped make many of the fledgling Italian education programs possible, Cannavo said. To date, he said Swedesboro-Woolwich, has received about \$44,000 in grant money from the Italian Consulate.

Gloucester County's large Italian-American population - second highest per capita in New Jersey to Ocean County - might explain some of the surge in the language's popularity. According to the 2000 U.S.

Census Bureau, there are 62,095 Italian-Americans living in the county, about 24.4 percent of the county's population.

It's not just those with Italian ancestry driving the upswing. Cannavo said students in the performing arts academy at GCIT were behind the effort at the school eight years ago.

"There's a couple reasons why overall it's becoming popular," Cannavo said. "It seems to be sort of fashionable if you look at the fashion designers and the fancy race cars. As a tourist site it's becoming more vogue to go there. Believe it or not, even Italy winning the World Cup last year has an impact."

Gina Mateka, director of secondary education at GCIT, said Italian continues to be a popular world language option. The school also offers Spanish and Latin.

"It is growing," Mateka said, noting that roughly 130 students are enrolled in classes. "The interest level is definitely there."

Earlier this month, GCIT was host to an Italian education conference where Cannavo and representatives of area Sons of Italy chapters gathered with area educators.

Among the topics of discussion was the challenge many districts face in finding certified Italian teachers.



Walter Hill fifth-grader Tiffany Crawford, 10 (right), recites the number 67 in Italian before her time is up. Looking on are (from left) John Morrone, 11; Jameela Harris, 11; and Aine Kelly, 10.

"One of the fears of a lot of the districts - and it's a legitimate one - is the lack of teachers," Cannavo said. "Certified Italian teachers are at a premium. When an Italian teacher leaves a school district, the district usually goes into a tailspin."

Between July 2004 and June 2005, New Jersey issued 1,000 teaching certifications in Spanish and 214 in French. The state issued 83 certifications for Italian during the same period.

The shortage of available certified teachers was cited by school officials in Washington Township in response to a petition drive by township resident Anthony Girardo last year.

About 40 students are rolled in after-school Italian courses for college credit through Gloucester County College, according to school officials.

"Any decision to adopt any additional world languages in

the high school curriculum will be reviewed when the adoption cycle comes due," said Jan Giel, spokeswoman for the district.

As teaching of the language continues to grow in the county, a future generation with and without ancestry traced back to Italy are learning to speak more than just Spanish or French in the classroom.

Trevor Elm, 11, a fifth-grader at Walter Hill School in Swedesboro, has been exposed to the language as part of the world language curriculum since fourth grade. Last week, he used his knowledge of numbers in Italian to win a game of bingo in his afternoon class.

"It's a different language and I can speak it and no one else at my house will know what I'm talking about," said Elm, who rushed to the teacher's desk to collect his prize for winning, a key chain with the outline of the country over a red, white and green background.