

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE WITH PHOTO**

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### **Non-Profit Celebrates 20<sup>th</sup> Year of Changing Lives**

**Cambria County, PA** – The Challenge Program, Inc. is celebrating twenty years of motivating students to build solid work habits while becoming a workforce pipeline for businesses.

The journey began in 2003 with a question, “What does it take to motivate young people to do well in school and in their future careers?” Posed by Daniel Perkins to Barbara Grandinetti over lunch, the answer led to the creation of four award categories that were matched to success in school and the workforce – Attendance, Academic Improvement, Academic Excellence, and Community Service. Tied to these awards was a cash incentive to mirror a job performance bonus.

Perkins was welcomed to speak to students at Bishop McCort High School in Johnstown, Pa where he challenged the sophomores, juniors and seniors to make it to the top of their class in one or more of the categories. He personally funded the awards for the 12 winners. With the success of this effort, The Challenge Program, Inc., a non-profit organization was launched. The following year, local businesses began lending their financial support and participation to sponsor the program in schools.

Since then, the program has grown to partner with companies in 128 high schools in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia, awarding nearly \$6 million and reaching 650,000 students. Grandinetti credits the program’s growth with having the ability to evolve and to meet the needs of both businesses and schools.

“Through our business partnerships, we have become a resource to schools in helping them to meet attendance and academic performance needs as well as PA State Workforce Readiness Standards.” She added, “While partnering with high growth industries that depend on a strong workforce, we have also listened to their needs, including adding the STEM award to our portfolio.”

Other targeted offerings for business partners include student and educator tours, classroom presentations, job shadowing, internships and hiring. This interactive student engagement is proving invaluable to the program’s business partners.

Washington Financial Bank (WFB) CRA Officer, Sandy Samples and her colleagues, Wealth Advisor, Nick Rawlings and Regional Branch Manager, Nan Campbell, brought Financial Literacy to Western Area CTC as part of their partnership “We presented sessions regarding budgeting, credit, wealth management,

and banking careers to assemblies of 200 students each. These students truly inspired us with their attentiveness, interaction, and enthusiasm,” she said.

Although the students are the ones who take home the awards for making it to the top of their class in the five award categories, the businesses that bring The Challenge Program, Inc. to each school realize the reward is theirs as well.

“This partnership allows WFB to give back in an interactive way to the young people in our community as they begin their journeys into adulthood,” said Samples. She added the partnership also “provides our young students with viable resources and training to help them become valuable members of our community.”

The Challenge Program, Inc. returns to schools this fall to kick off the program for the 2023-2024 school-year. For more information, including the program’s Students in the Workplace initiative, contact Mary Dreliszak, Director of External Relations, at 724-984-0860 or [dreliszakm@tcpinc.org](mailto:dreliszakm@tcpinc.org) and visit [tcpinc.org](http://tcpinc.org).