

Barb Grandinetti

The Challenge Program executive director

Barb Grandinetti has spear-headed the program's outreach since its inception 11 years ago, with a single mindedness to bring the unique, motivational program to as many schools in as many regions as possible.

She is passionate about The Challenge Program. Just ask her!

How did you become the executive director of The Challenge Program, Inc.?

I had worked for Crown America for 32 years. I started out at the front desk and in 1986, became the first woman vice president at the company. I traveled and met a lot of different people. It was an exciting environment. In

2003, the company was sold. I thought, "there must be a reason" and I prayed that God would direct me to where I could best utilize my experience and talents. And then I met Dan Perkins.

Dan Perkins grew up in Johnstown. At the age of 10, he

had an idea about how to make money. He asked a business owner to give him a chance, and he did. He liked Dan's young sense of ambition and began to mentor him, strongly encouraging him to go to college and become a Marine, just like he had done.

Dan did both, eventually earning three degrees and later opened his own business in Johnstown – MTS Technologies, Inc.

When we met, Dan explained his desire to "pay it forward" to the students of Johnstown, to encourage them to stay in school and make the best of their time. We knew money to be a motivator, but we also knew earning it was important. We came up with this real-world model of rewarding students the way businesses reward employees with cash incentives. We then considered the qualities employers look for in a workforce and we made those the award categories.

Dan knew I was on the school board for Bishop McCort High School. We approached Bishop McCort with our idea and they said "yes."

It was a hit! We knew we had something and that if it worked at McCort, it would work for other schools as well. We named it "The Challenge Program" and Dan asked me to be the executive director. I knew my prayer had been answered.

What exactly is The Challenge Program, Inc.?

The Challenge Program is a program for all students. We partner with businesses and together challenge students in grades 10-12 to cultivate good habits which will develop good qualities, leading to future success.

These habits are reflected in our award categories. The winners of each category are presented with a cash award. This partnership connects business and education. Businesses address a school assembly and educate students about the potential career opportunities available within their own communities.

Students often don't know what's in their own backyard. This dispels the common belief that they have to leave their hometowns or regions to find employment.

Businesses have the





THE CHALLENGE PROGRAM Inc.

Connecting Business and Education

unique advantage of speaking directly to students about their business and what it takes to be successful. This gives businesses the ability to affect the quality of tomorrow's workforce and the health of their communities.

Why is this so important?

Statistics show students still dropping out of high school at a rate of 20-30% a year depending on the region. Our business partners tell us that this is one challenging, recruiting factor, currently and for the future.

Additionally, we are in a period of time when baby boomers are retiring at an alarming rate each year. What we've learned over the years, through feedback and surveys, is that this program has been instrumental in keeping some students from failing out or dropping out. Attendance has gone up, grades have gone up and students are more involved with community service.

We've always had a workforce component to our program, but now it is at the forefront, increasing the reason for schools and businesses to join us in challenging students to create good habits now so they – and communities – will thrive and be successful.

What about success stories?

Where do I start? We constantly receive letters from students, parents and educators about the impact the program. Students who were failing and because they competed for an award, became honor students; students who had no direction and discovered a passion; students deciding to compete despite staggering personal issues learned that not giving up can be its own reward.

Businesses engaging with the schools

beyond the program have uncovered a unique pipeline to the future and a few have hired graduated students from the high schools they support.

You've mentioned "award categories" a few times. What are they?

Our award categories support the good qualities students need to develop for success.

They are: Attendance, Academic Improvement, Academic Excellence, Community Service and STEM (science, technology, engineering, math).

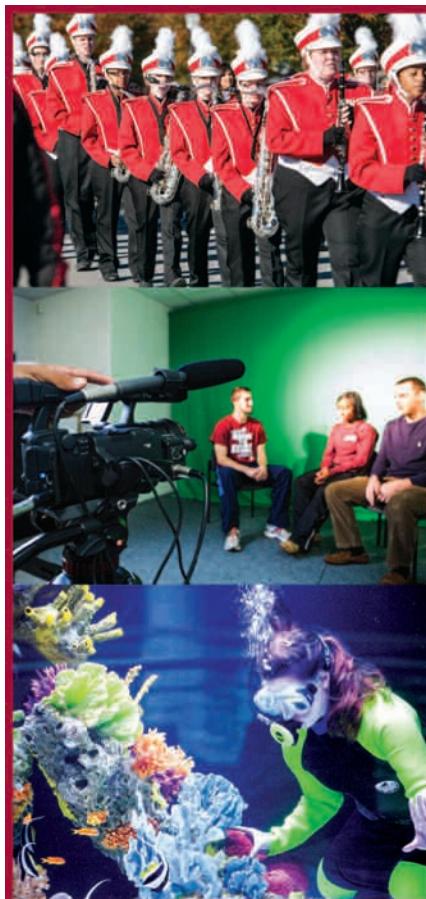
Through the support of our business partners, we present 15 awards per school each year.

How many schools and businesses participate in The Challenge Program, Inc.?

Over the past few years, an average of 120 schools, per year, participate in Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia. We currently have 100 business partners, many of whom have been with us since the beginning. In Cambria County, we have 15 schools participating.

How can a school or business participate in The Challenge Program, Inc.?

All anyone has to do is call us, or go to our website if you want to learn more about us and what we've accomplished and how we do it. You can reach us at (814) 533-7401, extension 100 or go to www.tcpinc.org.



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