

Students get cash incentives

BY KIRK SWAUGER
KSWAUGER@TRIBDEM.COM

SOMERSET - High-school students in Somerset County are getting more incentives for improving academically, going to class regularly and performing community service.

Along with better grades and a successful foundation for the future, they also could receive - cash.

The county commissioners said Tuesday they will donate \$5,000 over three years to The Challenge Program, a Johnstown-based initiative that awards students for their achievement.

"We are thrilled we have the support not only of the business community, but also from our

elected officials," said Barb Grandinetti, the program's executive director. "They realize what we're doing to try to retain our youth in the area."

Designed to connect students and the business community, the program offers high-school sophomores, juniors and seniors \$250 awards for achievement in four categories:

- Most-improved academically.
- Best attendance.
- Most civic service.
- Best overall grade-point average.

Each participating school district receives \$3,000 a year - typically through donations from area businesses - for the awards.

"Most of the school districts are sponsored by someone in the community," Somerset County Commissioner Brad Cober said. "It's a good program."

Among the county districts already participating are Berlin Brothersvalley, Conemaugh Township, North Star, Rockwood, Salisbury-Elk Lick, Shade-Central City, Shanksville-Stonycreek, Somerset Area, Turkeyfoot Valley and Windber.

Meyersdale Area does not, according to the program's Web site.

The 3-year-old program is expected to reach an estimated 70,000 students in 72 schools this year, awarding about \$216,000 to 864 students.