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Dan Perkins (foreground), owner and CEO of MTS Technologies Inc., listens as Don Zucco, president of The Challenge Program and former Johnstown mayor, speaks Thursday during The Torchbearers lecture series at the Pasquerilla Convention Center in downtown Johnstown.

Drain-no

The Challenge Program aims to keep the best and brightest here

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Don Zucco got all the training he needed to fight brain drain when he was mayor of Johnstown.

Dan Perkins, at one time, actually defined brain drain. A bright Johnstown native, Perkins had left the area to find success elsewhere.

Now Perkins and Zucco, the founder and president, respectively, of The Challenge Program, are on the forefront of finding ways to encourage the region's youth to not only succeed but to do it here.

On Thursday, they shared their experiences with the public at the Pasquerilla Convention Center in downtown Johnstown as speakers in The Torchbearers lecture series.

The series, sponsored by the John B. Gunter Leadership Program, highlights local success stories from the leaders who created them. Proceeds benefit The Challenge Program.

The Challenge Program offers rewards to area high school students for academic

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**DON ZUCCO,
THE CHALLENGE
PROGRAM PRESIDENT**

excellence in a number of categories. Zucco said it is another positive for the region and over time will keep more young people in the area.

"Mark Pasquerilla once told me that, if kids are not having a good time growing up here, why would they want to come back," Zucco said. "If this encourages them to come back, stay here and invest in our community, then it's a home run."

Perkins, founder of MTS Technologies,

left the region for many years growing his own career, but he never forgot his roots.

When he founded his company, he simultaneously opened offices in Virginia and Johnstown.

MTS Technologies now is slated to become one of the anchor tenants of the Greater Johnstown Technology Park in the city's Kernville neighborhood. MTS now has about 60 employees and could double its payroll by the time it moves into the new facility.

Perkins said that one of the biggest problems the region faces in retaining its young people is a disconnect between schools and the business community. He said many youngsters simply aren't aware of what opportunities exist locally.

"We hear all the time when we go to schools and meet with business that the schools don't know what businesses are doing in our region and vice versa," Perkins said.

"The Challenge Program goes into the schools and meets with area business to try to bridge that gap."