

Businesses offer incentives for Fayette, Westmoreland students

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Buzz up!

Tyler Doppelheuer has given The Challenge Program Inc. both a promotional face and the promise of a bright future.

Doppelheuer, a 17-year-old junior at Connellsville Area High School, was introduced last year to the Johnstown-based program that since 2003 has partnered with business in Western Pennsylvania to motivate and reward high school students to excel in their classrooms and in their communities.

"The goal of this program is to bring schools and businesses together, and the value of doing that comes with students like Tyler," Barbara A. Grandinetti, the program's executive director, said Thursday at an event promoting the initiative held by Patrick R. Wallace, president of Ligonier-based Covington Investment Advisors Inc., at Ligonier Country Club.

Last year, Doppelheuer made a cool \$500 via the program by topping his class's grade point average ranking and for his community service, including many hours of work with the Salvation Army, Special Olympics and Habitat for Humanity.

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This year, Doppelheuer said he has a lot more competition for the cash prizes and couldn't be happier about it.

"It's rewarding to my fellow classmates to get involved, but it's more rewarding to me to see them get involved," said Doppelheuer, who again leads his class in grade point average and would like to pursue a careers in both political science and law. "For participating businesses and those looking to donate, you're going to see your investment returned. Definitely."

Businesses taking part in the program are asked to donate a combined \$3,500 annually to each participating high school in their respective locales. The entrepreneurs who run those businesses then give students at each school a start-of-the-year talk on ways to succeed.

"Not only do individuals and their businesses provide economic substance to their communities, they can be an important venue for the youth of our community to discover themselves," Wallace said to an audience of about 25 academic, governmental and business officials.

In May and June, four members of each participating school's sophomore, junior and senior classes each will receive \$250 based on unparalleled achievement in four categories -- best overall grade point average, most improved grade point average from the prior school year, most community service and best attendance.

Over the 2007-08 school year, about 100 businesses have donated about \$300,000 to 93 school districts in 17 counties via the program, Grandinetti said.

Ligonier Valley School District took part in the program for the first time this year along with seven other Westmoreland County districts.

Reliant Energy provided the entire requisite donation for students at Laurel Valley Middle/High School, while students at Ligonier Valley High School received donations from L.J. Aviation, Markosky Engineering Group, Rolling Rock Club and the Sewickley Spa, said Linda Hammers, the program's senior manager of program development.