

# Connecting with kids

**R**ichard Bernazzoli, superintendent of schools for Portage Area School District, believes that his students benefit from hearing the success stories of businessmen in their community.

"When the kids see that an average student (like them) worked hard and now is sitting at the top of the CEO ladder, that makes an impact on them because it's their world, right here," Bernazzoli said. "It's important (for the students) to understand that. It makes their own goals not so remote."

Yet, until Portage Area High School began partnering with The Challenge Program in the 2004-05 school year, the relationship between the school and the local business community was virtually nonexistent.

Bernazzoli said that the lack of communication between businesses and schools was not due to a lack of interest, but rather a lack of opportunities to make that connection possible.

"When the idea (of The Challenge Program) was presented to me, I thought, here's our golden opportunity," he said. "For years, we've wanted businesses to come into the schools; we just didn't know how to do it."

He also emphasized that the need for positive community role models is more crucial than ever, as high school students today are confronted with social issues that "barely even existed" when Bernazzoli started his career in education over 30 years ago.

Bernazzoli's experience includes positions in every level of education, ranging from his first

job as a science instructor in 1975 to his current position as Superintendent of Schools.

He says that every level of administration brought new challenges, but he fought to overcome these challenges because he felt that he could contribute more at an administrative level.

Bernazzoli's educational background includes a bachelor's in Biology and a master's from St Francis University, as well as a master's in Administration and a Letter of Eligibility from Penn State.



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*The Challenge Program Inc. is a nonprofit organization headquartered in Johnstown whose dual mission is to award students with financial incentives for successes they achieve while in high school and to build a bridge between high schools and the local business community.*