

School encourages student volunteerism

Administrators at Altoona Area High School are using two unique strategies to encourage student volunteerism in the local community.

Internally, the school offers a practicum in volunteerism worth up to two academic credits to students in the senior grade level.

"We're trying to make students understand that community is an important part of education," said David Aboud, community service coordinator

at Altoona Area High School.

To further this aim, the school also partners with outside organizations to reward students for their community efforts.

Aboud noted the school's participation in The Challenge Program Inc., a nonprofit organization offering cash incentives to students in the sophomore, junior and senior grade levels in four categories: Most Community Service, Best Attendance, Best GPA and Most Improved.

The Challenge Program engages businesses in the local community to fund the cash incentives for students.

In exchange, businesses are invited into the schools to share their own success stories and to educate students about the job opportunities that are available



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to them in the area.

For Aboud, the interaction between business and education is what sets The Challenge Program apart from other award programs.

"Our (business) ambassadors have made clear the importance of education in the workplace," he said. "(They've) helped students understand that the school is not a separate part of the com-

munity, but intertwined with it."

Aboud noted that he has witnessed a marked increase in volunteerism as a result of The Challenge Program.

For the 2007-2008 school year, Altoona Area High School reported a total of 362 service hours completed by students.

In the 2008-2009 school year, that number came close to tripling, with students submitting more than 920 hours to The Challenge Program.

"The Challenge Program Inc. simply incentives well what schools are already trying to do," Aboud explained.

"It works hand in hand with the school to further the goals of education."

The Challenge Program awards at Altoona Area High School are sponsored by Blair Companies, Reliance Bank and

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**DAVID ABOUD,
ALTOONA AREA
HIGH SCHOOL
COMMUNITY SERVICE
COORDINATOR**

the Altoona Area School District Foundation.

The Challenge Program Inc. partners with businesses to provide financial incentives to high school students.