

Ridge students compete for dollars

By Megan Miller
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FISHERTOWN — For hard work in subjects like reading, science and history, students at Chestnut Ridge Senior High School will now get a bonus lesson in economics.

Beginning this school year, Chestnut Ridge sophomores, juniors and seniors have the opportunity to compete for \$250 monetary awards for individual academic achievements and community service.

The district has joined forces with a Johnstown-based company, The Challenge Program, Inc., and the Wal-Mart Supercenter in East Freedom, to reward up to 12 students with checks at the end of the academic year.

"This is about earning excellence and rewarding excellence," said Director of Program Development Renee Shaw, who introduced The Challenge Program to students in a Wednesday morning assembly.

The Challenge Program gives one award per grade level in each of four areas: attendance, community service, academic improvement and academic excellence. A student could potentially win in more than one category, Shaw said. The contest is open to 10th, 11th and 12th grade students only.

The organization founded



Gazette photo/Megan Miller

Renee Shaw of Johnstown-based company The Challenge Program addresses 10th, 11th and 12th graders at Chestnut Ridge Senior High School in a Wednesday morning assembly.

in 2003 by Johnstown native Dan Perkins, now works with about 110 schools in three states, Shaw said.

The Challenge Program has no hard statistics on any potential impact it might have on student grades or performance, and is just beginning to gather data, she said. The program has a 98 percent retention rate for both schools and award sponsors, Shaw added.

Twelve awards at 110 schools equals a lot of prize money. To fund the awards, the organization partners

each school with at least one local business or other entity willing to act as a sponsor.

While The Challenge Program coordinates award sponsors and provides the end-of-year checks, the job of tracking student improvement and community service falls to each school's guidance office staff, Shaw said.

The East Freedom Wal-Mart sponsors not only Chestnut Ridge, but also Central School District, according to Store Manager Sean Cassatt.

Cassatt also spoke during the assembly, telling students

that the awards are similar to a bonus check given to a store manager at the end of a productive business year.

All students in the sophomore, junior and senior classes are automatic participants in the competition for the cash awards, Shaw explained, because the contest is based on something they're already doing — academic work. At the end of the academic year, a Challenge Program representative will return and present checks to the top performing students in the four contest categories.