

Connellsville teen honored as student of the year

By [Nancy Henry](#)

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The Challenge Program named Ethan Keedy, a junior at Connellsville Area Senior High School, as Student of the Year. The presentation was given during the Crystal Owl Community Partner Award dinner held recently at the Hilton Garden Inn, Canonsburg.

The Challenge Program Inc. is a Johnstown-based nonprofit program which partners with businesses to provide sophomore, junior and senior high school students with financial incentives for achievement. A \$250 check is presented to 12 students at each participating school in four categories -- attendance, academic improvement, academic excellence and community service. Sponsors of The Challenge Program at Connellsville Area High School are Nemaquin Woodlands Resort and Spa and BAE Systems.

Keedy received the inaugural Student of the Year award because he demonstrates the spirit of The Challenge Program in an extraordinary way. He is a member of Connellsville Area High School Patriots and a volunteer at Mt. St. Macrina Nursing Center. Keedy is the student representative on the Connellsville Area School Board, the Fayette Cultural Trust and Connellsville's Recreation Board. Last year he was presented the Community Service award by The Challenge Program after performing 864.5 hours of volunteer work. He then coordinated the first annual Connellsville Walkathon with proceeds to benefit improvements at the city's East Park.

Michael Edwards of The Fayette Cultural Trust said, "Ethan is a great example to the youth of the area. We encourage young people to take an active role in their community by serving on boards and panels."

Keedy addressed his fellow students at The Challenge Program assembly in the fall of this 2010-11 school year, encouraging his peers to join him in making a difference in their community.

Mary Dreliszak, director of program development for The Challenge Program Inc. holds Keedy's work up as an example of excellence among today's youth.

"Last summer, an article published in The Daily Courier on Ethan's efforts to plan a Walkathon to benefit East Park caught our attention. We were very impressed by his initiative to improve Connellsville, one section at a time. Ethan's work with the high school Patriot's organization, the many hours he spends volunteering to brighten the lives of nursing home patients, his service to area boards and his desire for his peers to be a part of the betterment of the community, are deserving of this special recognition," Dreliszak said.

After accepting the Student of the Year award, Keedy delivered an outstanding speech for which he received a standing ovation from the crowd of business executives, education officials and federal and state legislators in attendance.

Keedy said, "I am often asked what motivates me to do community service. When I volunteered at the local nursing homes I loved walking in the facility seeing the residents faces light up. Last year when The Challenge Program held their assembly, I thought maybe I should log my volunteer hours because I can do a lot with \$250. That spring when Mary came back to announce the winners, I was sitting there thinking, 'Do you think it's possible that someone beat me. I hope so.' I was hearing people had 50 hours and 100 hours, but when the sophomore class came up and my name was announced with 864.5 hours, you wouldn't believe how many gasps there were in that auditorium. That was the first award that I received for my community service hours and I was humbled that someone noticed that I am trying so hard to make a change in this world. I was faced with comments afterwards like, 'Do you even have a life?' and my response is very short. 'Yes community service is my life.'

"I will graduate from Connellsville Senior High School next year and will move on to the University of Pittsburgh for four years and then on to an Ivy League college (hopefully Harvard). Then after receiving my law degree I want to run as a candidate for the Pennsylvania Senate seat. In 2032 I hope to run to be the second president from Pennsylvania," Keedy said.

Keedy thanks his mother for her support.

"I would like to thank my mom for always being there and supporting me by taking me to all my board meetings, and also I would like to thank The Challenge Program for supporting me and other students to reach the fullest potential and help us achieve great things."

Also honored at the dinner were CONSOL Energy, the recipient of the Crystal Owl Community Partner award and the Greene County Career and Technology Center, which received the Educator of the Year award.

The Challenge Program Inc. is active in 124 schools in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio and Delaware.

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