

to the **pointe**

BY JEFF KOTULA, PRESIDENT, WASHINGTON COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



Mary Dreliszak

After earning her bachelor's degree in communications from Carlow College in 1983, Mary Dreliszak's first job was executive assistant to Dan Rooney, president of the Pittsburgh Steelers. Since then, she has held leadership roles in public relations and development in educational, corporate and nonprofit settings.

She currently serves as director of program development and public relations for The Challenge Program, Inc. The nonprofit program partners with businesses to motivate high school students to excel while introducing them to careers in their backyard.

Since 2006, she and has helped to lead expansion of The Challenge Program, Inc. into 122 high schools and career and technology centers in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio and Maryland, including most of the secondary schools in Washington County. In her role, Mary has established more than 70 business and school partnerships and has presented motivational assemblies to more than 100,000 students.

Active in her community, Mary served as president of the Rotary Club of Connellsville and has spearheaded fundraising initiatives to assist those in need. Those projects include the C.A.P.S. Kid's Fund to restore a preschool lost to fire; Operation Sandy Claus to send Christmas to 1,800 high school students impacted by Superstorm Sandy; and A Night for Nancy, the Nancy Heinbaugh Fund, and a GoFundMe page to assist a local resident who sustained severe neurological and physical injuries in a vehicle accident.

Mary enjoys bringing a creative idea and a message to life and motivating others to achieve their fullest potential. A personal blog she launched, MaryMotivates.com, is driven by this mission. Connect with Mary on LinkedIn; Twitter @MaryMotivates and @TCPMary; and on Facebook at MaryMotivates.

▶ **WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB?**

I was 12 years old when I had my first job. I waited on bingo customers, every Wednesday evening, at the Fraternal Order of the Eagles in Connellsville. My base pay was \$2.50, but with tips, it could reach \$3.75. I discovered that I enjoyed customer service and loved making the bingo players smile. I would go home tired, but happy to have just enough money to buy a movie ticket and some popcorn for a Friday night out with my friends.

▶ **TELL US ABOUT THE MOST MEMORABLE CHILD IN THE CHALLENGE PROGRAM, INC.**

Valerie, a student at Freeport High School, entered her freshman year with little motivation and no goals. In her own words, "I skipped school, failed most of my classes, got into fights, and got suspended." After The Challenge Program, Inc. came to her school, she said, "No more!" From that day on, she developed a positive attitude, asked

teachers for help and is now taking honor level classes. She earned the program's Academic Improvement award and now has plans to attend veterinary school after graduation.

▶ **WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE VACATION SPOT?**

Ocean City, Md., at the Princess Royale Hotel was where my husband, Mark, and I vacationed with our three children. That is where our special memories are, so that would be my favorite spot.

▶ **WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PLACE IN WASHINGTON COUNTY?**

While Washington County abounds with beautiful places and spaces, I would have to choose Southpointe. Every time I drive through, I am amazed at the beauty and the business that is happening there. I would like to think that Washington County is the Energy Capital of the East, not only because of its natural gas resources, but because of the human energy that is housed in Southpointe.