



TCP Newsletter

Winter 2012 Edition

The Challenge Program, Inc.

★ The Results Are In! ★

Upcoming Events:

• **May 3, 2012-
Crystal Owl
Community Partner
Award Dinner**

*Visit our website,
www.tcpinc.org, for
more information*

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The results are in – and The Challenge Program continues to experience growth in the number of participating schools, students reached and dollars awarded.

A recent survey of 2,324 students in participating schools shows that students are increasingly motivated by The Challenge Program. The number of students who say The Challenge Program motivated them to better performance in the Community Service category jumped 8% from the 2009-2010 school year to the 2010-2011 school year.

In fact, the percentages in each category – Academic Excellence, Academic Improvement and Attendance – all increased. Additionally 91% of the students who took the survey say they would recommend The Challenge Program to other schools.

One student stated, “I would strongly recommend

The Challenge Program to other schools that do not have it, because not only does it motivate students to improve academically and strive for perfect attendance, but it also challenges students to be well-rounded in their personal lives. The Challenge Program encourages me to be the best student I can and challenges me to work harder in all aspects of my life.”

Of course, The Challenge Program would not be able to motivate so many students without the support of business sponsorship. There are currently 81 Business Ambassadors who make it possible for The Challenge Program to reward students for doing their best in and out of the classroom.

Barbara Grandinetti, the Executive Director at The Challenge Program, adds “It’s a privilege to be able to have an impact on these young students’ lives as

well as serving as a resource to businesses for their future workforce.”

With more than 100 schools on the waiting list, The Challenge Program is focusing its efforts on developing new partnership and collaborations with corporations, businesses, individuals and foundations in order to expand the program.

One student sums it up nicely: “The Challenge Program is an excellent way to motivate students to do their best in schools and around the community. With this motivation, students then further themselves to do better in the future as well as in the present. When students see a reason to do well or to work harder, they will. This is exactly what most students in today’s society need.”



★ **In just eight years, the number of participating schools has grown from 1 to over 100 schools throughout three states (Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia).**

★ **The total number of students who have been reached by The Challenge Program has increased to over 270,000.**

★ **Over \$1.6 million dollars has been given away to well-deserving students who have worked hard to earn the awards.**

Quality Life Services Makes Connections



Students from Kiski H.S. cheer for Eunice Arthur, 98, as she dances during the program

Susie Tack Beardsley, Chief Administrative Officer of Quality Life Services, shares in The Challenge Program's mission.

The Challenge Program awards \$250 checks to four students in each grade (sophomores, juniors and seniors) based on the categories of Attendance, Community Service, Academic Improvement and Academic Excellence.

Beardsley states that at Quality Life Services, they believe that The Challenge Program rewards are ones that will be important to all employers.

"When you're caring for the sick and elderly, these are all extremely important qualities," Beardsley says.

She explains, "The Challenge Program is important because it rewards students for their success in a simple and straightforward way. As in life, if you show up every day and work hard, you are more likely to receive financial awards."

Quality Life Services began in 1973 with one nursing home in Worthington, Pa. It has grown to eight nursing homes, two apartment complexes and a pharmacy and serves communities in five counties while employing over 1,000.

Beardsley adds that Quality Life Services' relationship with The Challenge Program is evolving as they are finding ways to involve residents in their homes with students at the schools.

One example is Eunice Arthur, a 98-year-old Scottish woman whose dance and tambourine routine warranted a standing ovation from an auditorium packed with Kiski High School students.

She performed to a German Polka and then proceeded to demonstrate the same talent to more contemporary music. Some students even joined her in dancing.

At the end of the program, a line of students formed to give Eunice a hug or kind words. Eunice later stated that it was one of the best experiences of her life. When asked about

the favorite part of her day, Eunice replied, "Well the dancing, of course."

The founders at Quality Life Services also value The Challenge Program categories when they look to hire.

Beardsley admitted that her favorite category is Attendance because it is arguably the foundation for the rest of the rewards.

She also points out, "However, we need someone willing to learn, and if they make a mistake, they need to demonstrate a willingness to correct it, do better next time and move on, which is what Academic Improvement is all about. Community Service shows a concern for others and an attitude of being willing to go above and beyond of doing only what you're getting paid to do."

Beardsley adds that The Challenge Program has an impact on businesses by keeping them involved with the communities and schools. "It gives us a chance to speak to potential employees and emphasize what our company views as important," she says.

By encouraging residents in the homes to participate in The Challenge Program's awards ceremonies and creating relationships between students, company owners and the residents, the relationship continues to evolve. "The results have been amazing," Beardsley says.

Those at The Challenge Program work to convey the message to students, and with help from people like Susie Tack Beardsley, the program can continue to grow and reach even more students. **TCP**

John Marshall Principal Shares TCP's Goals



*-Corey Murphy
- John Marshall H.S.
Principal*

"It's the only award program that motivates the majority of the students.

We see real competition."

- Corey Murphy

Corey Murphy has been involved in education for 10 years and is currently the Principal of John Marshall High School in Glen Dale, West Virginia. He believes hard work and success go hand-in-hand and works with The Challenge Program to instill that message in his students.

The Challenge Program provides a \$250 check as incentive for high school students in the sophomore, junior and senior classes who excel in four areas: Academic Excellence, Academic Improvement, Attendance and Community Service.

Murphy shares The Challenge Program's goals and says the best part about the program is "keeping the kids aware of what's important - getting here on time and working hard."

Murphy began his teaching career at Central Catholic High School in Wheeling, WV where he rose to Athletic Director and Assistant Principal - a job he loved. After four years, he transferred to John Marshall High School as an Assistant Principal where he was then promoted to his current position.

John Marshall High School is one of the largest secondary schools in West Virginia with over 1,200 students. The school is sponsored by Chesapeake Energy and Tele Tech.

Murphy says that Tele Tech has been particularly hands-on by inviting students to see their workforce and industry first-hand.

At John Marshall High School, Academic Improvement and Community Service are Challenge Program categories that produce serious rivalry as being the categories most students can compete for with some chance for success. This competition and continuing student effort is encouraged by reminders in the school announcements every two weeks.

Murphy explained that community service plays an important role at JMHS. The school hosts clubs that include a chapter of the American Red Cross, Young Democrats of America and Teenage Republicans. During his three years as Principal, students have also contributed over 28,000 hours of community service.


He pointed out that one student logged 731 community service hours to be sure of winning the award. That means the student completed at least 20 hours of service each week.

In regards to The Challenge Program, Murphy added, "It's the only award program that motivates the majority of the students. We see real competition. The students can see cold, hard cash." He also noted that most students

have goals for the money such as helping their families pay the bills and buy groceries or saving it for college and other long-term plans.

The teachers, administration and parents have been telling students that punctuality and hard work are important. Murphy believes that the message means more when it comes from an outside source, like The Challenge Program. Murphy stated, "When someone outside their community group tells them this, suddenly it hits home."

One memorable story for Murphy was of a student who brought his GPA up from .143 to 3.0. "It was a shock." Murphy admitted that they checked and re-checked the numbers and even went to the student's teachers to ask if it was possible. The answers were unanimously 'yes'. One teacher said he had transformed into a star student. Not only did his grades improve, but so did his attitude.

The Challenge Program awards seemed to have given this student the incentive he needed to turn himself around. And with the support from educators like Murphy, The Challenge Program can continue to motivate students to achieve their goals. 

Coming Soon...

Senior Award Ceremonies are fast approaching. The Challenge Program will be contacting you soon to put your Senior Award Ceremony on your calendar.

Past TCP Award Winner Continues to Strive

Success can be defined as the prosperous attempt to reach a goal. Kayla Pongrac is the perfect example of success that can come from working hard and doing the seemingly little things to achieve one's dreams.

Kayla's story begins with her winning The Challenge Program's Community Service Award three years in a row (2006-2008). She had a passion for writing, and as part of her community service, she edited a manual for a local computer expert who needed the help and offered to pay her, but she declined.

She also volunteered at the Somerset County humane society and helped prepare for the Light the Night Walk. She explained, "I really wanted to volunteer my time, and I also wanted that recognition at the end of the school year. It definitely gave me a sense of pride."

In addition to the recognition, she also won a \$250 check for each year that she won the award. A portion of the money went toward a new laptop.

As a gesture of gratitude, she wrote PBS Coals, the sponsor at Shade-Central City High School, a thank you note. She was then

invited to a breakfast event where Hank Parke, Director of Business Development and Public Relations at PBS Coals, stood up and read her note.

"I didn't plan on going to that breakfast because my dog Ginger was dying, and I was just a mess. But my parents encouraged me to go," she admitted. While at the event, she met the publisher for the *Daily American*, Andy Bruns, who asked her to write for the newspaper. She contributed as a bi-weekly columnist.

Ginger passed away soon after the breakfast event, so Kayla's first column was dedicated to her beloved pet. Many readers told Kayla it was her most memorable column. For animal lovers in the community, her sad piece hit home, and they showed her support and even sent her cards.

Another opportunity arose after graduating from high school when Kayla was offered a job at The Challenge Program where she learned about professionalism and gained valuable workplace experience. While there, she helped revise the orientation assemblies to try and get students more involved in the presentation.

In the fall of 2008, Kayla

attended the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown where she majored in Professional Writing with a concentration in Media Writing. In December 2011, she graduated from UPJ with Magna Cum Laude honors and is still writing her bi-weekly column for the *Daily American*.

She is a correspondent for *Our Town Magazine*, *Somerset Magazine* and *Windber Magazine* and is also working at Laurel Arts Company. "It's pretty much the ideal job for me—I've always wanted to combine my passions for writing and all forms of art. So here I am, writing about art and promoting art in my community. I feel so blessed."

Kayla advises students to thank the people behind the scenes. Her success story shows that hard work along with following a passion can lead to greater opportunities, and also, a simple gesture of a thank-you note can touch someone and have positive effects.

Kayla points out, "I really feel as though I would be an entirely different person had I not been granted the opportunities that the Challenge Program afforded me." TCP



*-Kayla Pongrac
-Past community service
award winner*



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The Challenge Program, Inc.'s mission is to partner with businesses to motivate high school students both in and out of the classroom. This partnership creates good habits in students and provides businesses with tangible results for their investments.

The program achieves this mission by awarding 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students awards in four categories: Academic Improvement, Attendance, Community Service, and Academic Excellence.