

'Torchbearers' lecture series starts tonight

BY SHAWN PIATEK
THE TRIBUNE-DEMOCRAT

Jane Gleason knows as well as anyone what the Johnstown region offers its residents.

Gleason left the region for 25 years, spending much of her time in the Washington, D.C., area. It wasn't too long into that quarter century that she began to long for home. But like many of today's young people in the region, she didn't think there was opportunity for her here.

Now, Gleason believes that line of thinking is a myth.

That's why she and others in the John B. Gunter Leadership Initiative program have made it their project to present a lecture series titled "Torchbearers."

■ The Gunter Leadership Initiative, sponsored by Greater Johnstown/Cambria County Chamber of Commerce, is designed to develop leadership in the region. For more information on the Gunter program or the Torchbearers series, call 536-5107.

The four-part series will feature individuals from the region who have found business success here. It kicks off at tonight at 7 with Bill Polacek, founder of JWF Industries, speaking at the Holiday Inn in downtown Johnstown.

"Our team decided to do this

lecture series because there has been so much talk in recent years about brain drain," Gleason said.

"We want do something that would show it's a positive thing to stay in the area or that you can return to the area and succeed."

Following Polacek will be Dan Perkins and Don Zucco of The Challenge Program on Nov. 1 at the Pasquerilla Convention Center, Steven Sheetz of Sheetz Inc. on March 13, and a panel of executive women May 15 at the Holiday Inn downtown. All lectures begin at 7 p.m.

"Everyone we asked unequivocally said, 'Yes,'" Gleason said.

"We initially came up with a list of 50-plus people, which is a wonderful thing because we

want it to continue after the project is over."

Business and community leaders are expected to attend, as well as students taking part in The Challenge Program.

Gleason said that Mount Aloysius College, St. Francis University, Cambria Rowe Business College and Penn Highlands Community College will have representatives on hand to discuss what their institutions have to offer.