

EDUCATION

Series highlights local opportunities

On Nov. 1, the Torchbearers Lecture Series will feature The Challenge Program's Daniel T. Perkins and Donato B. Zucco as speakers.

Jane E. Gleason, vice president of Gleason Inc., said the series highlights successes of local business people in order to inspire professionals and students to stay in the Johnstown community.

Gleason said this message is of particular interest to the team that organized Torchbearers because many of its members are Johnstown natives who left the area to find work. They assumed, as have many, that there is no opportunity to build successful careers here in Johnstown.

Through this lecture series, Gleason and her team members hope to prevent other business people and students from making the same mistake.

Gleason noted that the involvement of Perkins and Zucco with The Challenge Program was an important factor in choosing them as speakers.

"The Challenge Program promotes what (Torchbearers) is trying to promote as well," she said, "that you don't have to leave the area to be successful."

Perkins is founder and chairman of the The Challenge Program board, as well as president and CEO of MTS Technologies

If you go

What: Latest in the Torchbearers Lecture Series, featuring Daniel T. Perkins and Donato B. Zucco.

When: 7 p.m. Nov. 1.

Where: Pasquerilla Conference Center, downtown Johnstown.

Tickets: \$15. All proceeds will benefit The Challenge Program.

Information: Greater Johnstown/Cambria County Chamber of Commerce at 536-5107, or by e-mail, torchbearers@johnstownchamber.com.

Inc., headquartered in Arlington, Va.

Perkins grew up in the Johnstown area.

His road to success started at age 12, when he decided to start a shoeshine business to make extra cash. Perkins and some friends ran the business outside a Johnstown car wash. His entrepreneurial spirit impressed the car wash owner so much that he eventually became its manager.

In 2003, Perkins founded The Chal-

lenge Program as a way to give back to the community where he was raised.

He said the ultimate goal of the program is to motivate high-school students to succeed. He said the program is like the business world in that it awards top achievers "bonuses" for hard work.

"If an employee does a good job (in the business world), we reward them with a bonus," Perkins said. "The Challenge Program does the same thing for students who perform in an exceptional manner: We give them a bonus. It has worked for the business world, and it's working for students as demonstrated by higher grades, greatly improved attendance and overall interest in school."

The lecture will also feature Zucco, who is president of The Challenge Program and former mayor of Johnstown.

Zucco's experience includes 20 years in public education as a teacher, principal and superintendent. He said his education experience attracted him to the program.

"For me, (The Challenge Program) was a nice match," Zucco said. "I liked the idea of using a business model to provide incentives for outstanding performances. I've always enjoyed education and young people, and (the program) gave me a chance to use my business experience as well as to



THE CHALLENGE PROGRAM

Kayla Washko

encourage young people to succeed."

Zucco is expected to talk about the experiences that molded him and gave him the confidence to pursue four very distinct careers in education, health care, real estate and politics. He also plans to talk about his future.

"Successful leaders know where they are and have a clear sense of where they are going," Zucco said. "I plan to stay productive and involved."

The Challenge Program is a nonprofit organization located in Johnstown that provides financial incentives to students for successes they achieve while still in high school. The Challenge Program also aims to provide a bridge between high school students and the local business community.