

Addressing work-force needs

Shawn Kaufman, human resources director for Riggs Industries, thinks that an investment in The Challenge Program Inc. is "cost-effective advertising."

As the sponsor of The Chal-

lenge Program Inc. awards at Somerset County Technical Center, Riggs Industries has the opportunity to address a full assembly of students twice annually: At an orientation assembly in the fall and an

awards assembly in the spring.

Riggs Industries is a construction and industrial manufacturing company based in Somerset County.

Kaufman said the company is always looking for new ways to market itself to potential employees, because area businesses must compete for young recruits who are skilled in trade professions.

"The problem we have is that not enough kids are going into trades," he said.

"We've got a lot of people in our industry who are going to be retiring soon, and that talent is walking out the door. There aren't enough kids following in their footsteps."

Kaufman said that Riggs Industries became involved with the program because it saw an opportunity to be in front of the type of student that the company usually employs.

"When I presented (The Challenge Program) to my boss, there was no hesitation," he said. "If we can do something to get our name out in front of the kids, we'll get the look when we're competing out there."

Kaufman also noted that The Challenge Program's four award categories - Best GPA, Most Improved, Best Attendance and Most Community Service - instill positive values about work ethic and motivation in the minds of students.



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He said that these traits are a major concern for employers today, as young recruits seem more likely to miss a project deadline or to skip work altogether than older workers.

"I had a guy who was only coming in to work three days a week," Kaufman said. "When I asked him why, he said, 'because I can't survive on two.'"

"Our only chance to change that kind of behavior is to get them while they're young," Kaufman said.

"By the time they get to our level, it costs us money."

Kaufman noted that Riggs Industries has renewed its commitment to The Challenge Program for the 2009-10 school year.

"It's really worked for us," he said. "It's one more vehicle to be in front of the administration and the students, and it fulfills our role as a community citizen."

The Challenge Program Inc. is a nonprofit organization whose dual mission is to provide high school students with financial incentives for success and to build business-education partnerships.