

Program challenges students

With the start of a new school year, representatives from The Challenge Program Inc. are holding orientation assemblies at schools across the area.

On Sept. 15, Daniel T. Perkins, founder of The Challenge Program and chief executive officer of MTS Technologies Inc., returned to his alma mater - Greater Johnstown High School - to remind students that if they work hard this school year, the program may reward them with cash.

Perkins also spoke about his humble beginnings and how he worked his way to the top.

"I want our future to be run by the best," Perkins said.

"And the best is right here in this room."

The Challenge Program provides financial incentives to students for achievement in four areas - community service, academic excellence, academic improvement and attendance - in the sophomore, junior and senior grade levels.

Also present for the assem-



ROSE WAGNER
The Challenge Program

bly was Barbara A. Grandinetti, executive director of The Challenge Program.

"Our goal is to provide our youth with the opportunity to do great things," Grandinetti said. "To expose them to enterprises that will make life better for not only their generation, but future generations."

Katie Kovalchik, a senior and past award winner, said Perkins' story was refreshing.

"Some people have the perception that if you grow up here you can't go anywhere afterward," Kovalchik said. "He is definitely an exception to that. It means a lot that he still

cares about the school that he came from."

Renee Shaw, director of program development at The Challenge Program, also spoke at the assembly. She described the program, reminding students that a new school year means a fresh start and a chance for everyone to win.

Shaw asked students a simple question: "Who doesn't want \$250?"

"The Challenge Program is making an investment in you," Shaw said. "We are awarding excellence."

Shaw also spoke to students about the importance of "selling and marketing themselves globally" in the work force after they graduate.

She noted that many employers look for extra qualities that make applicants stand out, such as their work in the community or their attendance records. By setting and achieving goals in high school, students will better prepare themselves for the competitive work force, she said.

"If you don't make the choice

to be the best, there is no other option," Shaw said.

Matt Bodenschatz, a representative from the Mount Aloysius College admissions department, emphasized the importance of standing out and said he believed that building a work ethic in high school will "prepare students for the professional world."

Shaw spoke about the challenges and roadblocks that students may face in achieving their goals. She also pointed to the importance of perseverance.

"We all have adversity, but that is no excuse not to excel," Shaw said. "No matter how difficult it is, keep trying. Even if you fail, keep trying."

Awards at Greater Johnstown High School are sponsored by Mount Aloysius College.

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.