



ROSE WAGNER

The Challenge Program

Sowing seeds of success

On Oct. 1, Barbara Grandinetti, executive director of The Challenge Program Inc. and a Bishop McCort alumna, returned to the school, which first adopted the program.

During her visit, she reminded students to strive for success.

Six years ago, Daniel T. Perkins, Johnstown native and chief executive officer of MTS Technologies, sought a means to give back to the community that helped him develop into a successful businessman.

Perkins met Grandinetti, a Johnstown businesswoman who was serving on Bishop McCort High School's school board at the time.

Together, they created a program that would provide incentives for high school students to excel and motivate them to give back to their communities.

The result of their collaboration was The Challenge Program, which provides financial incentives to students in four award categories: Academic achievement, community service, attendance and academic improvement. The awards are given to sophomores, juniors and seniors.

To connect students to the community, Perkins and Grandinetti asked for support from local businesses, so students could hear the stories of successful professionals. Carpenter Financial Services and the Catanese Group, both of which are owned by McCort alums, committed their support.

Paul Carpenter, Bishop McCort alumnus and representative of Carpenter Financial, spoke to students about his business and how he built his successful foundation while in high school.

"McCort was a huge part of my success," Carpenter said.

"Academically, McCort is a giant, and it is definitely a giant part of my background."

Kathleen Wallace, representing the Catanese Group, also spoke at the assembly.

Wallace tied in the importance of high school education to the work force.

"Things are constantly changing and transforming in the workplace, just like in your high school," Wallace said. "You are responsible to respond. It's up to you."

Perkins and Grandinetti were hugely successful in their vision. Bishop McCort adopted The Challenge Program, and since then, three states, 21 counties, 110 schools and dozens of businesses in Pennsylvania, Delaware and West Virginia have partnered with the program. The Challenge Program has distributed more than \$1 million to high school students.

Grandinetti and the representatives from the Catanese Group and Carpenter Financial Services said they were thrilled to be giving back to their alma mater, which provided a starting point for their career successes.

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.