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Hospital supports student program

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— Sherry Bender, human resources generalist/recruiter for Indiana Regional Medical Center, says The Challenge Program Inc. is “a natural fit” for the hospital’s long-term recruitment strategy, which involves building partnerships within the local community.



Sherry Bender (left) of Indiana Regional Medical Center is shown with United High School Challenge Program award winners. Submitted Photo



Kayla Washko Submitted Photo

Since 2007, IRMC has sponsored The Challenge Program’s student awards at two participating high schools in Indiana County: Saltsburg and United.

The Challenge Program awards 12 students in the sophomore, junior and senior classes with a \$250 check for achievement in four categories: Academic excellence, academic improvement, attendance and community service.

Bender says these four award areas closely align with the qualities IRMC seeks in its employees.

“My favorite is attendance,” Bender said. “It shows the student’s dependability. In a team setting, your co-workers really depend on you to be there.”

As a Challenge Program business ambassador, IRMC is invited to speak with students at Saltsburg and United twice annually – at an orientation assembly in the fall and an awards assembly in the spring.

Bender says she uses the opportunity to highlight the range of career opportunities available at the hospital.

“I like to remind the students not to forget about us, their hometown community hospital, when they’re looking for a job,” she said. “We’re the second-largest employer in Indiana County. We offer great benefits and competitive salaries.”

Bender also noted IRMC’s continued recognition as one of the best places to work in the nation. In 2009, IRMC ranked fourth out of 50 Best Large-Sized Places to Work in Pennsylvania, 19th of the 100 Best Places to Work in Healthcare, and 60th on FORTUNE

magazine's 13th annual "100 Best Companies to Work For" list, Bender said.

Bender began her career at IRMC in 1987 as a medical technologist. With the help of IRMC's tuition reimbursement program, she earned her MBA from IUP.

In her 23 years at IRMC, Bender has identified a few qualities that she says make the hospital stand out from other health-care providers.

"The leadership here is what makes the difference," Bender said. "IRMC is still a community-based hospital, not part of a system, and we plan on staying that way."

IRMC remains engaged with local high schools and universities by offering hospital tours, in-school presentations, job shadowing and internships.

"We had three recent requests from United High School students to come for job shadowing," Bender said.

"Part of their graduation requirement involved 16 hours of job shadowing for a career field they're interested in."

At the end of each school year, Bender returns to Saltsburg and United with The Challenge Program to incentivize students who have excelled in academics, attendance and community service.

For Bender, meeting the award winners is the most rewarding part of her involvement with the program.

"Giving out the money is my favorite part," she said. "It warms my heart because I know those kids really worked for it."

The Challenge Program Inc. is a nonprofit that partners with business to motivate students in and out of the classroom. This partnership creates good habits in students and provides businesses with tangible results for their contribution.



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