

December 31, 2008 - 'We're proud of all of you'

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By PATRICK BUCHNOWSKI

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Some of the area's brightest young students were honored Tuesday at a reception at the Holiday Inn-Downtown.

The annual holiday gathering sponsored by U.S. Rep. John Murtha, D-Johnstown, was for students in the 12th Congressional District currently enrolled in or nominated for one of the military academies.

During a time when young people in the region are entering military academies, Murtha said the gathering of 42 students was a tribute to their commitment to their country.

"I say it over and over again that unfortunately during this war period only a few people are making the sacrifice," Murtha said. "We're proud of all of you who have made that commitment to this great country."

One of those is Anthony Choros, 23, a Penn Cambria graduate and second lieutenant at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md.

"I look up to Congressman Murtha and respect what he has done and what he continues to do," said Choros, who plans to become an infantry officer.

"He gave me a shot and helped me the whole time I was there," Choros said.

Cambria County President Commissioner P.J. Stevens praised the students for their dedication.

"To see (Murtha) work with these young people and help them get their place at the various academies is remarkable," Stevens said.

"They are the cream of the crop, and you have to admire them for dedicating themselves to the service of this country."

Midshipman 1st Class Julie Barca, 23, of Westmoreland County, is an incoming brigade commander at the Naval Academy, where she will be in charge of all midshipmen enrolled at the academy.

"(Murtha) is the reason I'm here," Barca said. "If I wouldn't have had his nomination, I wouldn't have the opportunity to be at the academy."

Barca said she plans to enter the Marine Corps and attend flight school.

The attendees had a chance to have their picture taken with the congressman and enjoy a variety of appetizers.

Pennsylvania Adjutant Gen. Jessica Wright also attended along with local officials.

Murtha, a former Marine, earned an 18th term in November when he overcame a strong challenge from Republican William Russell, a career Army man and Iraq war veteran.