

Program salutes Medal of Honor winners

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PHILADELPHIA — Tradition, tenacity and technology are the themes of today's Congressional Medal of Honor Society's Symbol of Freedom program.

The Independence Hall event, celebrating achievement against odds, will be broadcast to schools across the state by the Distance Learning Center of the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Gov. Tom Ridge will be joined by former

President George Bush, Pennsylvania U.S. Sens. Arlen Specter and Rick Santorum, Philadelphia Mayor Ed Rendell, and entertainers Bob Hope and Billy Ray Cyrus.

More than 120 of the 185 living Congressional Medal of Honor recipients are also expected to be on hand for the afternoon ceremony, followed by tonight's dinner event where Bush will be presented with the Patriot's Award.

Pennsylvania schools will receive the broadcast from 11:45 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., via computer and satellite technology. Students will hear the Society's message of freedom,

opportunity and responsibility.

Media Mayor Robert McMahon served as event chairman at Ridge's request. McMahon initiated the "Beating the Odds" essay contest to have students from across the state relate their personal stories of overcoming difficult challenges. Nine young winners will be honored with scholarships.

McMahon said the week's events represent an effort to raise scholarship money and take the "Beating the Odds" program nationwide. Seven hundred of the thousand seats for the afternoon ceremony have been allocated to high school students, including 90 from Penncrest High School.