



**Employees at Eastern Connecticut State University in Willimantic have stepped up to make masks for area responders and frontline workers in many fields.** Courtesy of ECSU

# The masked crusaders

## ECSU volunteers sew to help those on the front lines

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**WILLIMANTIC** — As the need for protective face masks continues, the local university has committed to try and replenish some of those shortages.

Volunteers from Eastern Connecticut State University in Willimantic are making homemade masks for organizations on the front lines of the pandemic.

The effort is being coordinated

by Eastern's Center for Community Engagement.

"We all are worried about the drastic increase in coronavirus infections and if you are like me, you wonder what we can do to help," said CCE Director Kim Silcox in a release issued by Eastern.

"We are encouraging anyone with a sewing machine to help make masks that can be donated to nursing homes, senior living centers and other sites where masks are in very

short supply."

As of April 20, Gov. Ned Lamont ordered all state residents to wear masks when they go outside and cannot avoid maintaining the social distancing guidelines of six feet.

For most residents, this means wearing a mask when grocery shopping, getting gas or purchasing take-out and delivery services.

But personal protection equipment shortages are occurring through-

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**Eastern Connecticut State University Center for Community Engagement Director Kim Silcox, left, ECSU management information specialist Trudy Hyatt, center, and CCE university assistant Nancy Deede, right, show off some of the handmade mask made by ECSU employees.** Courtesy of ECSU

# Eastern volunteers sewing masks

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out the state, both at health care businesses and for other essential staff like grocery store clerks and senior living center staff.

“We have had a great core team, but everyone has been helping out,” Silcox said Friday. “We have had some donations of fabric and supplies which has really helped as supplies are low.”

The core team includes about 10 people that make masks, as well as about an additional 25 who have been making masks for friends and family.

The CCE made its first major delivery of masks to the Seabury retirement community in Bloomfield earlier in April.

“We received an incredible act of goodwill and generosity today from Eastern Connecticut State University,” wrote Seabury staff on its Facebook page on April 6. “As our own residents and staff have been creative in making their own homemade masks, this boost from Eastern couldn’t have come at a better time. The first batch of 54 masks arrived today and we couldn’t be more grateful.”

Since then, masks have also been delivered to the Covenant Soup Kitchen, the Windham Region No Freeze Project, the Holy Family Home and Shelter, St. Joseph Church, Access Community Action Agency, CT Legal Services, Windham Community Memorial Hospital and many other organi-

zations throughout the area.

As of this week, nearly 570 masks have been donated, according to Silcox.

“I have appreciated the opportunity to make face masks and honored to be making them for people in my community,” said Mary Oliver, university assistant for the CCE in the release. “Production making is an art in itself and making different designs that people have requested is a technical challenge to which I look forward. Using fabrics I have on hand (quilt scraps, cotton clothing, old sheets and pillowcases) is a creative experience in itself.”

Homemade masks are not equivalent to N95 masks or surgical grade masks used by health care providers.

However, they do provide

some protection from the virus and are in line with the governor’s orders.

“I’m so glad there are community folks just jumping into this, as the process of making something really useful now is a small way to give back,” Oliver said.

Other Eastern groups are getting involved, like Eastern’s Office of Environmental Health and Safety, which donated 1,200 surgical masks to the Windham Emergency Management office, that were distributed to various agencies across town.

*Two mask patterns endorsed by the CCE are available at [bit.ly/2S2ldKg](https://bit.ly/2S2ldKg) or [bit.ly/2zqlWQd](https://bit.ly/2zqlWQd).*

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