By COREY SIPE
Chronicle Staff Writer

WILLIMANTIC — Eastern Connecticut State University’s Jessica Patrizi and Richard Magner, best friends since fourth-grade who lived five minutes from each other in Beacon Falls, were recognized earlier this year as recipients of the Henry Barnard Distinguished Student Awards.

At an April 6 program at the Aqua Turf in Southington, they shared the stage in winning an award that is the premiere academic event of Connecticut’s four state universities.

A total of 12 graduating seniors from Central, Eastern, Southern and Western Connecticut state universities are honored each year.

To be considered, the student must have at least a 3.75 grade-point average, a community service record and be nominated by the president at his or her university.

Patrizi transferred to Eastern in spring 2012 and decided to major in biology and minor in health and physical education.

She was selected by biology professor Barbara Murdoch to conduct independent research dealing with the regeneration of neurons in the peripheral nervous system.

This research may result in a solution for patients with traumatic brain injury and neurodegenerative disorders, which is an area of passion for Patrizi.

Patrizi has earned multiple grants and scholarships and is the only student at Eastern with enough expertise to operate the university’s $250,000 confocal microscope on her own.

“She works at a level expected of the best graduate students,” said Murdoch.

Among her studies, Patrizi has been a varsity athlete on Eastern’s volleyball team, a tutor for the Academic Services Center (ASC) and a volunteer at Yale-New Haven Hospital.

Through assisting her classmates with chemistry and biology in the ASC and tending to patients at the hospital, Patrizi has found practical applications of her studies.

Patrizi aspires to become a doctor and was accepted at the Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine.

In pursuit of becoming an osteopathic physician — one that focuses on holistic, body-mind wellness — she will continue her research on stem cells and neuroregeneration.

Magner has been called “the most exceptional student I have known in my 20-plus years as a full-time faculty member,” by Marsha Davis, chairman of the mathematics and computer science department.

During his career at Eastern, and working with mathematics professor Mzam Khan, Magner has performed research in the field of number theory.

This research eventually led him to receive Eastern’s first Sum-mer Undergraduate Research Fellowship, which he used to further study number theory and the sub-topic of modular hyperbolals.

These experiences culminated in two separate publications in peer-reviewed journals and presentations at several prestigious conferences.

Magner is also a tutor and has worked three years at the Mathematics Achievement Center, graded papers for the math department and spent a summer at Ohio State University in the Ross Mathematics Program.

As a junior, he served as a teaching assistant for a faculty member who went on medical leave for seven weeks.

Magner helped determine the curriculum and teaching strategy for the class, as well as give guest lectures, help write exams and tutor students — all for no credit.

He is also the founder and president of Eastern’s Math Club, which was named “best new club” for the 2011-12 academic year. Magner enrolled in Boston University’s doctorate program in mathematics with hopes of eventually becoming a professor at a university where he can teach and conduct research.

— SPECIAL NEIGHBOR —

Childhood friends continue to succeed at Eastern

Eastern Connecticut State University students Jessica Patrizi and Richard Magner, both of Beacon Falls, were recognized earlier this year as recipients of the Henry Barnard Distinguished Student Awards.