Eight-year-old Isabel Burdette sits with Tommy outside the Willimantic Elks Club on Election Day recently. She was waiting with her buddy while her parents voted.

By MICHELLE FIRESTONE
Chronicle Staff Writer

WILLIMANTIC — Andrew Zlotnick, Tracey Boyden and Cynthia Konney can relate to current Eastern Connecticut State University students and their college experiences.

That's because all three are Eastern graduates.

The three alums, who were recently inducted into the Eastern Fellows Program, shared their college experiences with students during a panel discussion in September.

The program is designed to recognize alumni who are distinguished in their careers and give current Eastern undergraduates the opportunity to speak to them about their experiences.

Zlotnick, who graduated Eastern in 1985 and was an environmental earth science major, is a senior vice president at Fuss & O'Neill, a civil and environmental engineering firm.

Fuss & O'Neill has offices in Manchester and Trumbull, as well as offices in Massachusetts, South Carolina and California.

"It was totally unexpected and when the university called me, I guess I was flattered and definitely proud to be nominated," Zlotnick, a Glastonbury resident, said, referring to his induction.

He said he really enjoyed the curriculum and professors at Eastern.

Zlotnick, who has a master's degree in hydrogeology from Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, said students who attend a public university like Eastern can get just as good of an education as students attending a private university.

"My experience is that Eastern does prepare students for a great career," he said.

Konney, an environmental earth science major who graduated in 1977, is a nationally recognized gemologist who runs a gemological company, New England Gemological Laboratory & Appraisal Services LLC.

She currently lives in Mystic and her company has offices in West Hartford, New Canaan and Old Saybrook, as well as offices in Maine and Massachusetts.

Konney advised Eastern students to enjoy their time in college.

"It's a great campus," she said. "Four years go by very quickly, so don't rush it."

Konney, who grew up in Willimantic, said she felt she missed out on campus life as a commuter student.

"I was always working," said Konney.

Boyden, a biology major who graduated Eastern in 1989, is currently a principal scientist at Pfizer who holds several patents.

According to a press release, she advised Eastern students to be "humble" when working at their first jobs while speaking at the panel.

"Admit to not knowing things," she said during the panel, according to the press release. "I'm happy when I see younger employees asking questions."

Boyden also advised Eastern students to participate in non-academic activities.

"Get your nose out of your book every once in a while," she said in the press release.

Since being established in the 2008-09 academic year, 26 alumni have been inducted into the Eastern Fellows Program at Eastern Connecticut State University. With them is Eastern President Elsa Nunez.