Three receive Eastern awards in honor of MLK

By KIMBERLY WETZEL – Chronicle Staff Writer

WILLIMANTIC — While the federal holiday honoring Martin Luther King Jr. has come and gone, local university officials recently honored several people for promoting the ideals of King — a civil rights activist.

Kevin Booker Jr., Charles Chatterton and Courtney Callaway were all awarded Eastern Connecticut State University’s Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Distinguished Service Awards in February.

The awards — which honor individuals who commit to an inclusive society and believe in diversity — are presented to three individuals each year, one being a faculty member or staff, another being an Eastern student and the last a member of the community.

Chatterton, a professor of kinesiology and physical education at Eastern, was the faculty award recipient.

He created the initiative, “Taking Strides to ‘Brake’ the Cycle of Poverty,” which is geared toward raising awareness of poverty in America.

“When we think about the Eastern community, we think of inclusiveness,” Chatterton stated in a release. “We think of trying to make a difference in everyone’s life. At Eastern I’ve been very blessed for the opportunity to grow.”

Chatterton coupled his love of running with his commitment to promoting poverty and hunger awareness, and completed four marathons in six months time to raise money for the Catholic Campaign for Human Development — an anti-poverty program.

He ran more than 100 miles in marathon mileage alone, taking one stride at a time to raise awareness and help break the cycle of poverty.

Chatterton said he believes everyone can make a “positive difference.” So far, Chatterton has completed 62 marathons — which equates to 1,624.4 miles.

According to a press release, Chatterton’s initial goal was to run a marathon for each million people living in poverty.

Recent census statistics show 46.7 million people in America living in poverty.

Therefore, Chatterton not only met but exceeded his initial goal of completing 46 marathons.

Callaway, a senior majoring in social work, was the student recipient.

Callaway was recently accepted in Boston College’s master’s degree in the Advanced Standing Clinical Social Work program.

As a student, Eastern officials said Callaway is involved with the women’s center, the intercultural center, the senior class committee and the student advisory council — which are just a fraction of her on-campus activities.

Callaway, who believes in social justice for all, has worked with the Campus Activity Board to make sure there are inclusive events at ECSU — including underrepresented communities.

“Being awarded for the work I’m most passionate about is such a crazy thing to me,” Callaway stated in a release. “No matter what obstacles you meet in life, keep going. I’ve learned so much at Eastern. I will take this knowledge and foundation of advocating for equality and justice everywhere I go.” And Booker received the award as a member of the community.

Booker is a teacher in the New London schools who, according to a release, works with victims of sexual assault.

Booker facilitates leadership and diversity workshops and speaks publicly throughout the United States.

As a child, Booker remembers stopping at a gas station when he was a child and his dad gave $10 to a young man.

The young man went into the store and bought lunch meat and bread for his siblings and he remembers his dad saying, “Don’t forget.”

“That’s what you have to do in the community,” he said. “Give back.”

And as a result, Booker stated, “I took those words and I put them in my heart.”
From left, Charles Chatterton, a professor of kinesiology and physical education at Eastern Connecticut State University, ECSU senior Courtney Callaway and Kevin Booker Jr., a teacher in the New London schools, recently received Eastern’s Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Distinguished Service Awards.

Contributed photo