



Eastern Connecticut State University

NEWS

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Eastern to Present Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Distinguished Service Awards

Willimantic, Conn. - An Eastern Connecticut State University student, a psychology professor at the University, and a New Haven community worker were honored at Eastern's annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Distinguished Service Awards Reception yesterday in the Paul E. Johnson, Sr. Community Conference Room in the J. Eugene Smith Library.

Student awardee Mike McKenzie, a senior from Windsor, is majoring in communication. McKenzie is the president of the M.A.L.E.S. (Men Achieving Leadership Excellence and Success) student club, having been a member since his freshman year. McKenzie is also a member of Eastern's Campus Activity Board; a sports announcer on Eastern's News 22 newscast; and has served as a student orientation counselor at the University. He also is a member of the CBS Radio promotions team and is engaged in training at the Harford Wolfpack Hockey team's Department of Sales and Marketing.

McKenzie has been active in the community and a positive influence on others as well. "Mike is a distinguished young man who has overcome obstacles and continues to work hard and grow as a man. He exemplifies Dr. King's ideals," wrote Eastern student Cheick Mbengue in his letter nominating McKenzie for the award.

Margaret Letterman, associate professor of psychology at Eastern, received the award in the faculty/staff category. Letterman grew up in California, and as a single parent of five children, worked more than 70 hours a week. She has a passion for helping students and volunteers for numerous student programs and activities. Over the past several years she has organized Thursday night dinners at the Knight House which the Eastern community regularly attends.

“At the Thursday night dinners, students (and occasionally members of the faculty and staff) are using a hot meal and the warmth of companionship to bridge cultural barriers and forge unexpected friendships,” wrote Edward Osborn, director of university relations at Eastern. David Stoloff, professor and chair of the Department of Education, agreed. “If one goes to one of the Thursday evening dinners at the Knight House, one will see the kindness and loving attention she shows all of the students. She is a caring teacher who is concerned for the success of every student she meets, whether in her classes or on campus. Margaret manifests the spirit of Dr. King all year long and is highly deserving of this recognition.”

In fall 2007, Letterman started a First-Year Program cluster -- “Perception and Writing,” with English professor Meredith James to assist STEP/CAP students at Eastern. She is also an advisor for the Organization of Latin American Students, one of the university’s most active student organizations.

Eastern presented the community member award to New Haven resident Elise Cofield. Cofield worked on cotton and tobacco farms throughout her childhood, where she dreamed of helping less fortunate people. She began to realize her dream by becoming a teacher, teaching for 31 years in North Carolina, Virginia and the Hamden public school system. She also supervised student teachers at Southern Connecticut State

University. Since she retired 20 years ago, she has been working with New Haven residents living with HIV or suffering from AIDS.

Cofield originally began her work inside a room in the Immanuel Baptist Church in New Haven. Today, she works out of a 21-room house, donated in 1996 by the State of Connecticut. This facility has helped to expand her services to serve more clients in need of healthcare and guidance. At 83 years of age, Cofield continues to work with the AIDS Interfaith Network, where she helps many people from diverse cultures. She has given talks at AIDS conferences in South Africa; Portland, OR; and Baltimore, MD., and has traveled to California to help other ministries care for individuals with AIDS.

“God and others have helped her to fulfill this dream, and she continues helping others as she passes along cheering someone with a word or song, knowing her living has not been in vain,” said New Haven resident Jermita Kimbrough, who nominated Cofield for this award.

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Eastern Connecticut State University is part of the Connecticut State University (CSU) system and is the state’s public liberal arts university. ECSU serves more than 5,000 students each year on its Willimantic campus.

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