



Eastern Connecticut State University

# NEWS

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**For Immediate Release**

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## **Eastern Students Volunteer for Romantic Willimantic Chocolate Festival**

**Willimantic, Conn.** – Twenty Eastern Connecticut State University students are volunteering to help local businesses in downtown Willimantic prepare for the city's fourth annual Romantic Willimantic Chocolate Festival.

The students are working through Eastern's Office of Community Service, helping decorate the windows in the downtown area for the Feb. 16 window decorating contest, along with the many other events taking place from Feb. 14 - Feb. 17.

On Feb. 14 at 10 a.m., the 26<sup>th</sup> annual Romantic Willimantic Cupid Crowning takes place at Windham Town Hall. Each year since 1982, on Valentine's Day, a local civic leader or citizen is crowned as Willimantic's "Cupid" for his or her contributions to the city. Past cupids have included WILI-AM (1400) radio personality Wayne Norman, and current Windham First Selectwoman Jean de Smet. On Valentine's eve, seven galleries in downtown Willimantic will open their doors for a downtown art stroll from 4-8 p.m.

On Feb. 15 from 6-8 p.m., the Capitol Theater will host the second annual “A Chocolate Lover’s Affair and Romantic Broadway.”

On Feb. 16, romance in Willimantic comes out in full force with an entire day of events throughout the downtown area. From 11 a.m. - 4 p.m., businesses will open their doors with free samples, menu specials and activities for the public. Individuals can catch a ride from one end of downtown to the other on board one of several Ford Model Ts that will be shuttling guests around town.

On Feb. 17, Valentine weekend comes to a close when the Willimantic Orchestra concludes the 2008 Chocolate Festival with its annual Romantic Willimantic Concert in Eastern’s Shafer Hall at 3 p.m. Selections will include J. Strauss’ “Kiss Waltzes”; Ravel’s “Piano Concerto in G”; Hanson’s “Symphony #2 Romantic”; and Rossini’s “La Gazza Ladra.” The concert is free; however, donations will be welcomed. Shafer Hall is located at the corner of Windham and Valley Streets.

The first Romantic Willimantic Chocolate Festival began in 2005 as a grassroots community event organized after the success of the popular Third Thursday Streetfests in Willimantic.

For more information about the Romantic Willimantic Chocolate Festival, contact Ruth Hartunian-Alumbaugh at 860.423.9156 or e-mail [chocolatefest@windhamARTS.org](mailto:chocolatefest@windhamARTS.org)

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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.

## PRESS RELEASE

Press Contact:

**HED: Willimantic Plays Host to a Tasty Tradition**

Chocolate lovers can rejoice as the Romantic Willimantic Chocolate Festival returns for its fourth annual installment Valentine's Day weekend.

**Thursday, February 14**

Valentine's Day marks the start of the four-day event with the 26th Romantic Willimantic Cupid Crowning at Windham Town Hall at 10 am. Each year since 1982, on Valentine's Day, a local civic leader or citizen is crowned as Willimantic's "Cupid" for his or her contributions to the city. Past cupids have included WILI 1400 radio personality Wayne Norman, and current Windham First Selectwoman, Jean de Smet.

On Valentine's eve, seven galleries in downtown will open their doors for a **Downtown Art Stroll** from 4:00 PM until 8:00 PM. Participating galleries include:

*Whispering River Gallery*, 750 Main Street. The most recent gallery to open in the downtown area. This cooperative gallery features a group exhibit of local artists. Pieces on display and for sale range from oil painting, photography, sculpture, and woodturnings.

*Capitol Theater Gallery*, 896 Main Street. The gallery at the Capitol Theater hosts *The Picture Show*, a group exhibits photographic work by UCONN Fine Arts Undergraduates.

*WindhamARTS Collaborative: Main Gallery*, 866 Main Street. Opening reception for *Alaska: Culture and Art*. This exhibit features the work of Gina Prewitt and will include Alaskan headdresses and detailed beadwork,

*Kerri Quirk Studio*: 824 Main Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor. Artists Kerri Quirk and Tom Menard exhibit their folk artistry.

*Swift Waters Artisans' Cooperative*, 750 Main Street. A charming artists cooperative featuring handcrafted products and artwork from over 30 artists.

- **MORE** -

*ArtSpace Windham*, 480 Main Street. "50/50." This exhibit contains 50 digital images made by 50 artists from Eastern and Western Connecticut. All the artists began with the same initial image.

*The Lily Pad*, 34 North St. *Lily Pad Allstars*. Group show featuring work by Lily Pad art

supply store employees.

### Friday, February 15

The *Affair* runs from 6:00 until 8:00 PM where guests will be treated to a grand buffet of cheeses, handmade and imported chocolates, fudges, Venetians, Baumkuchens, hand dipped fresh and dried fruits, cheesecakes and more. An Italian Barista will serve gourmet specialty coffee, espresso, and cappuccino. Live music will feature performances by Flamenco and Classical guitarists. A silent auction will include specialty made cakes donated by local bakers. Following the *Affair*, at 8:00 PM guests will enjoy *Romantic Broadway* in the main stage theater. *Romantic Broadway* will feature a live musical revue with selections from some of Broadway's most memorable and loveable shows.

Tickets for both *A Chocolate Lovers Affair* and *Romantic Broadway* are \$15.00 per person or \$25.00 per couple, and can be purchased by calling the WindhamARTS Collaborative at 860-450-1794 or visiting the Capitol Theater box office the night of the event.

On Saturday, Festivalgoers can vote for the best romantically themed window display in participating businesses. Throughout the day, festivalgoers There will be ice-sculpting demonstrations on the sidewalk and a chocolate cake-baking contest.

Aside from Saturday's festivities, the event also marks one of the first occasions in which the many Hispanic owned businesses in downtown are opening their doors to participate in the citywide event. Ruth Alumbaugh, volunteer chair of the Chocolate Festival, combined forces this year with local Hispanic businesswoman, Ana Laura Giro to gain more Hispanic participation and cross cultural barriers. Alumbaugh states, *"This will truly be a taste of our town through ethnic partnerships and collaboration. Local businesses will also participate in the first ever window decorating contest and the public will vote on their favorites."*

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**Sunday**, As The 2008 Romantic Willimantic Chocolate Festival promises a weekend of fun, and excitement for all ages. The Chocolate Festival is a cultural, intergenerational event. For full event schedules, cake baking contest rules, and event information visit [www.romanticwillimantic.com](http://www.romanticwillimantic.com) or call WindhamARTS Collaborative at 860-450-1794.

### Sponsors

The Romantic Willimantic Chocolate Festival is a grassroots community event produced by volunteers and support from WindhamARTS Collaborative. The 2008 Romantic Willimantic Chocolate Festival is sponsored by Gulemo Printing and Embroidery, the Chronicle, Willimantic Renaissance, EASTCONN, Scott's Cyclery of

Willimantic, and the drive, energy, and spirit of the community at large.

(Editors Note: EASTCONN is a regional education service center and is not related to Eastern Connecticut State University)