EASTERN
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Historical Willimantic photos courtesy of Ron Robillard and Windham Textile and History Museum

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Reflections from the President

On Sept. 3, 1889, the Willimantic State Normal School opened its doors to 13 young women seeking to become elementary schoolteachers. As our students, faculty, staff, alumni and the local community celebrate the 125th year of our existence — now as Eastern Connecticut State University — I am reminded of what has not changed on our campus since 1889.

One quality that hasn’t changed is the close-knit relationships forged between our faculty and students; they take place on campus during a student’s time at Eastern and continue long after students have graduated to launch their careers. Another Eastern value that has stayed constant over our 125-year history is the University’s commitment to the Windham community. Just as the students of the Willimantic State Normal School did their student teaching in classes filled with Willimantic children, today’s Eastern students, faculty and staff remain committed to local residents. Through activities such as serving on local nonprofit boards, beautifying downtown during Town Pride Town Wide Day, and feeding the hungry during our annual Day of Giving each November, Eastern contributes more than 100,000 hours of time each year to the community.

At the same time, it is clear that our campus reflects the social, technological and economic changes that have occurred over the past 125 years—changing social norms, the Internet and online learning, and the creation of new academic disciplines in response to economic and social change are all examples of the growth we have experienced on this campus.

This issue of EASTERN Magazine celebrates our traditions and our progress by taking a look at Eastern’s past, present and future. To illustrate the past, you can read about the 125th anniversary celebration that has taken place on and off campus. The story on Eastern’s longstanding commitment to inclusion and access to education also looks back at our efforts to provide minorities, war veterans, economically disadvantaged students and other groups of people with the benefits of a college education.

The present? What better way to share Eastern’s current success than to showcase outstanding alumni who are making a difference in Connecticut and beyond. Other current accomplishments including our new class of Alumni Fellows, faculty awards and publications, and the achievements of undergraduate researchers at Eastern. News of athletic accomplishments on and off the field include the heartwarming story of soccer player Jon DeCasanova’s successful fight against cancer.

Eastern’s future is bright, and you can watch it grow in real time as the new Fine Arts Instructional Center continues to rise into the sky between High Street and the Student Center. Expect an invitation to the center’s grand opening in about 18 months! Finally, we continue to attract a record number of alumni donors, new donors and new major gifts. Such assistance is critical to our ability to offer a quality, affordable liberal arts education to our students. With this support, Connecticut’s public liberal arts university can continue to provide educational access and transformative opportunities to our students, preparing them to excel in their careers and in prestigious graduate schools.

I want to thank every member of the Eastern family who helps ensure that our future prospects are as promising as our past has been.

Elsa Núñez
President
Eastern Connecticut State University is celebrating its 125th Anniversary this year with a series of special events, displays, multi-media productions and other activities.

“It is a time to celebrate the traditions we cherish and the growth and progress we have made on our campus over the past 125 years,” said Eastern President Elsa Núñez in announcing plans for the anniversary.

“We have come a long way from our beginnings in September 1889 as the Willimantic State Normal School, when 13 young women enrolled to become primary grade schoolteachers. Today we are Connecticut’s public liberal arts university, providing more than 5,300 students each year with intellectual skills and applied learning opportunities that prepare them for professional careers. Even as we have grown, we have remained faithful to Eastern’s tradition of establishing personal, lifelong relationships between our students and the faculty.”

The highlight of the University’s celebration was a series of monthly events held this past spring, each focusing on a different aspect of Eastern’s history and campus life.

One hundred and fifty students, faculty and staff joined President Núñez in the Betty R. Tipton Room for “Education at Eastern: Past, Present and Future.” The event included two panel discussions—one featuring alumni and one presented by faculty — as well as a display of historical photographs — all of which highlighted how teacher education has been a central part of Eastern’s mission since its beginnings in 1889.

“The Roaring Twenties and Then Some!” was the focus of the second anniversary event, as more than 125 faculty, staff and students filled the Betty R. Tipton Room to celebrate the arts at Eastern. Over a traditional “luncheon tea,” the assembly was treated to music, art and theatrical performances from 1914-1939, including a slideshow of “The Art of Bygone Days” created by visual arts students Solinda Keth and Cassandra Marion, under the direction of Professors Anne Dawson and June Bisantz.

The program continued with music selections by students, including Scott Joplin’s “The Entertainer” performed on the piano by Sean Hanrahan; “Just My Bill” from the 1927 theatrical production of “Show Boat,” performed by Moriah Perrett; and “Mack the Knife” sung by Renee St. John. Kyle Girard and Alexis Kurtz sang George Gershwin’s “Who Cares?” and Melinda DeDominici performed “Someone to Watch Over Me,” also written by Ed Osborn.
by Gershwin. Lucy Shea, Michael Siddell, Derwin Hill and Jessica McDonald showcased the first scene from the play, “Prelude to a Kiss,” which was performed in the Harry Hope Theatre from Feb. 27 to March 5. In addition, Ta Anh, Moriah Perrett and Alexis Kurtz sang Paul Stookey’s “There Is Love” from the same play. The students were directed by lecturer Gloria Trombley.

The celebration “Take Me Out to the Ballgame” honored Eastern athletics. A slide show illustrating the history of athletics at Eastern (look at the uniform worn by the women’s basketball team in 1898!) was followed by a video highlighting the career of basketball coach Bob Miller, whose visionary work moved Title IX forward on our campus. A panel featuring Beth Regan ’79, Don Beerworth ’61 and current students Ashley Wolk (lacrosse) and André Reynolds (hurdles) discussed the growth of athletics on campus, and the event concluded with a “Go Warriors!” cheer led by the cheerleading squad.

The Business Administration Department teamed up with the Society for Human Resource Management, the Connecticut Business and Industry Association’s Education Foundation, and various student clubs to present student projects and a panel discussion on “The Workforce of the Future.”

The Spring was highlighted by Science Day at Eastern. During a luncheon in the Betty R. Tipton Room, students, faculty and staff heard from emeriti faculty Max Ferguson, Phil Elliott, Ralph Yulo, Steve Kenton and Sherman Clebnik, and Physics Professor Tim Swanson (48 years at Eastern and counting!), who were featured in a short, informative video, “The Bards of Science,” about the past 50 years of science at Eastern.

Using the latest “clicker response” technology, the audience also participated in “Are You Smarter than a College Freshman?”, which tested people’s knowledge of science facts. Following the luncheon, the campus community had the opportunity to see science demonstrations and experiments in the Science Building and Planetarium, ranging from how bioinformatics are used to treat cancer to astronomy advances and DNA experiments.

Earlier in the day, science faculty and students hosted more than 60 students from the Windham STEM Academy and gave them a tour of campus and the wonders of the Science Building.
Eastern wrapped up its spring semester series of 125th Anniversary celebrations with Community Engagement Day. The day began with a luncheon and panel discussion in the Paul E. Johnson Sr. Community Conference Room.

Panelists Anabelitza Lozada ’11, Levar Mitchell ’12, Matt Blocker-Glynn ’03 and Victoria Nimirowski ’87 then discussed how they turned their community engagement experiences at Eastern into successful careers.

Lozada is the social worker for the Support for Pregnant and Parenting Teens program at Windham High School. Mitchell works as a sports, fitness and recreation director at the Boys and Girls Clubs of Hartford. Blocker-Glynn has directed the University of Hartford’s Center for Community Service for the past six years, and Nimirowski has been the executive director of the Windham Area Interfaith Ministry (WAIM) since 2005. Clifford Marrett, director of the Center for Internships and Career Development, served as the moderator.

In the afternoon, the CCE sponsored the annual Service Expo, with student volunteers displaying posters and other visual representations of the various service projects that took place during the 2013–14 academic year. The annual Distinguished Service Awards ceremony followed in the Student Center Theatre.

Kimberly DePaolis, a junior double-majoring in early childhood education and psychology, won the Student Community Engagement Award for her leadership, fundraising and volunteer work locally and abroad.

Professor of Anthropology Ricardo Perez earned the Faculty Community Engagement Award for working with Eastern students in service projects with Willimantic schools in the Puentes al Futuro (Bridges to the Future) program. The Community Partner Engagement Award was given to Christopher Brechlin ’09, who worked as an AmeriCorps volunteer with the ACCESS Agency and is now the CEO of Blueprint for a Dream, a “social enterprise” that focuses on northeast Connecticut. Sociology Professor Cara Bergstrom-Lynch won the Service Learning Award for her fundraising efforts and community organizing.

In the evening, “La Familia de Mucho Colores,” a community cultural celebration of dance and
music held in the Betty R. Tipton Room concluded Community Engagement Day.

In addition to the spring series of events, a 30-foot timeline of the University’s 125-year history is being displayed in the Student Center, with each of five sections showcasing a 25-year span of time.

Eastern students also have been involved in the anniversary season — Communication students participated in a video contest which yielded several promotional videos showcasing their vision of what makes Eastern strong, and Visual Arts students are planning a public art project in the local community this fall.

“In addition to all of the on-campus activities and media presentations, this special anniversary edition of EASTERN Magazine is our way of sharing our 125th anniversary celebration with alumni and friends,” said Kenneth DeLisa, vice president for institutional advancement. “Each of our alumni has their own set of memories, and they, in turn, are our most important legacy. We have also been pleased with how supportive the local community has been in helping us celebrate our history — it’s their history too!”

DeLisa was referring to a commemorative supplement published in early May by the Willimantic Chronicle and a week-long series of interviews of Eastern faculty, students and administrators conducted on WILI-AM’s “Wayne Norman” talk show.

In the fall, the University will conclude the year’s celebration by dedicating a time capsule that will eventually be installed in the Fine Arts Instructional Center, to be opened in 2039 during Eastern’s 150th Anniversary. Mark your calendars!
Although Marc Freeman ’93 entered Eastern with plans to become a high school teacher, he soon discovered that biology was his calling. He took on an independent research project with Biology Professor Michael Adams, beginning a journey that would last the rest of his undergraduate career and a friendship that continues today.

“My time here was really transformative,” Freeman said during his acceptance of the 2013 Eastern Alumni Association Distinguished Alumni Award. “The faculty focused my energies on positive things.” Freeman and Adams spent hours working side by side, and Freeman’s love and knowledge of biology continued to grow. “The professors were serious about science but embraced the notion that you have to have fun.”

An honors graduate, Freeman later earned his Ph.D. in Biology at Yale University. He then conducted postdoctoral study at the University of Oregon where he chose glial cell development and function in the brain as his specialty. Since 2004, Freeman has been a medical researcher and associate professor at the University of Massachusetts Medical School’s Department of Neurobiology, where he pursues advanced research on glial cells.

Prior to Freeman’s research, very little was known about glial cells. He welcomed the opportunity to explore new territory, and work with these overlooked cells continues to keep his lab busy. Freeman and other neurobiologists have now demonstrated that glial cells play more important roles in brain health than had been previously realized, including helping the brain recover after injury.

In 2009, Freeman became a recipient of a prestigious Early Career Scientist Award from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, one of only 50 scientists across the country to receive the honor. In spring 2013, Freeman was appointed as an “Investigator” of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, a designation that recognizes exceptionally innovative and creative scientists and provides them with lifetime research awards.
The annual award, which approaches $1 million a year, gives Freeman the freedom to pursue research that is significantly changing the field of neurobiology.

Jeffrey Benedict ’91 is an acclaimed writer who has tackled topics ranging from athletes and crime to eminent domain, leadership and ethics in business. His most recent release, “The System: The Glory and Scandal of Big-Time College Football,” which was co-authored with friend Armen Keteyian, became a New York Times bestseller after its first week of sales. This is quite an accomplishment for someone who considers himself the most unlikely of writers.

Benedict was already married and juggling two part-time jobs when he attended Eastern. A serious student who devoted his time to studying, Benedict first thought that he would become a history professor. He began thinking about law school after a constitutional law class sparked his fascination with the topic, and planned to become a prosecutor. It was during the pursuit of his law degree that his first book, “Public Heroes, Private Felons: Athletes and Crimes Against Women,” was published.

“I wrote my graduate school thesis on victims of sexual assault when the perpetrator is an athlete, and how the system works against women,” said Benedict. When the thesis was complete, he thought the subject should be shared and he rewrote it for a public audience. It was published and the book’s success attracted the attention of publishers. Benedict, who received his J.D. from the New England School of Law, was offered the chance to turn writing into a career. He decided to take the opportunity.

“When writing, I begin with a subject that is compelling to me personally, since it will take up two years of my attention,” Benedict said. “The topic must also appeal to a large audience.”

Benedict quickly found that when writing non-fiction, there can be an unexpected aftermath following a book’s release. Benedict’s books on athletes and crime led to him serving as an expert witness on behalf of rape and domestic violence victims. His book, “Without Reservation: The Making of America’s Most Powerful Indian Tribe and Foxwoods the World’s Largest Casino,” led to a run for Congress and the start of the non-profit organization The Connecticut Alliance Against Casino Expansion. Other books by Benedict have become the basis of a Discovery Channel documentary and a segment on ABC News 20/20.

Today Benedict teaches courses on advanced writing and current affairs at Southern Virginia University, and lives on an organic farm with his wife of 25 years and their four children.
Benedict is also a contributor for Sports Illustrated and SI.com, where he delivers several in-depth stories each year, including two recent cover stories on Duke University basketball sensation Jabari Parker.

“It’s hard to believe that I’ve had the experiences I’ve had,” said Benedict. “When you work on current events you get involved in people’s lives. It’s had a big effect on me and my family. There aren’t many dull moments.”

David Whitehead ’84 was enjoying a successful career in publishing when the love of his community steered him to a new profession, a switch that has led to a flourishing career and an even deeper involvement with the region he calls home.

Whitehead, a business administration major, was working as president and publisher of the Norwich Bulletin and as an executive with Gannett Co., Inc., the nation’s largest newspaper publishing company. When a position opened at Backus Hospital in Norwich, Whitehead felt it was time for a change.

“I was born in Norwich,” said Whitehead, whose wife Tara is also an Eastern graduate. After raising five children, they are deeply rooted in their community. “I jumped at the chance to move from a national company to a local one.” Since 2013, Whitehead has served as a Hartford HealthCare senior vice president and president of the healthcare system’s East Region, which includes Backus Hospital, Windham Hospital and a number of outpatient and ambulatory centers throughout eastern Connecticut. Prior to this appointment, Whitehead served as Backus Hospital’s president and chief executive officer, beginning his healthcare career as vice president for corporate communications at Backus.

“My background in human resources and communications gave me a great opportunity to get into a different industry,” he said. Whitehead has a master’s degree in labor relations and earned a second graduate degree in healthcare administration. By the time he was appointed president and CEO of Backus Hospital the transition felt natural.

While a student at Eastern, Whitehead began to learn valuable lessons that he has carried with him throughout his career. One has been to always reflect upon yourself. “As careers develop, hone the ability to look at yourself and your actions,” he said. “The behaviors you exhibit are an example to others how to perform and interact.” His devotion to Norwich and the surrounding area are surely an example to his colleagues.

“I continue to live, work and play in eastern Connecticut,” said Whitehead. He has returned to his alma mater as a member of the ECSU Foundation Board of Directors, is chairman of the Board of Trustees for Norwich Free Academy, and serves on the boards of the United Way of Southeastern Connecticut, local chambers of commerce, Three Rivers Community College and Hospice Southeastern Connecticut. “I find personal value in that work,” said Whitehead, who champions the importance of education in our communities.

As for Whitehead’s time at Eastern, meeting his best friend and partner in life was to him the most valuable part of his education. “The best part of my experience was finding her.”
Today, Eastern draws students from 164 of Connecticut’s 169 townships. But 100 years ago, it was still a regional teacher preparation school for young women in eastern Connecticut. Most students were the first in their families to attend college; even now, more than 40 percent of Eastern students are first-generation students.

As the normal school grew, broadening its curriculum and changing its name to the Willimantic State Teachers College, access was expanded to include new groups of students. The first two male students — Frank King and John McClellan — enrolled in 1893, but even in 1900, there was only one male student in the school. In 1939, there were enough men for a basketball team; they won their league championship in 1942. The teachers college hosted ROTC training during World War II, and the post-war GI Bill provided the impetus for hundreds of new male students to enroll at the college.

In 2014, almost 60 years after Brown vs. Board of Education, equal opportunity for minorities — including access to a quality education — remains a challenge in our society. Inclusion and access to education for minorities, however, has been a hallmark of Eastern since its early years.

The first two African American students graduated in 1908, including Felicia Terry, who earned her teaching certificate and taught in a one-room schoolhouse in

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By Dwight Bachman and Ed Osborn

Increasing access to education — public education — has always been part of Eastern Connecticut State University’s core mission. Initially bringing higher education to young women in eastern Connecticut who wanted to become schoolteachers, and then later to those outside of the educational mainstream — war veterans, African Americans, the urban poor, Native Americans and Latinos — Eastern has been at the forefront of providing a college education to a broad spectrum of Connecticut residents in the pursuit of happiness and a better life.

In 1889, when the Willimantic State Normal School opened its doors, the two-year teacher preparatory school was joining an educational movement spawned more than half a century earlier. Visionary leaders such as Horace Mann had argued for what was to become America’s public K-12 school system. For centuries prior, a formal education was only for the wealthy and privileged.

To ensure the quality of instruction in the new public education system, a cadre of trained schoolteachers was needed, and normal schools cropped up around the country to prepare those fledgling teachers. Teaching was one of the few occupations at the time where women led the way, although all of Eastern’s principals and presidents were men until 2006 when President Elsa Núñez was hired.

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Canterbury. She later became a writer for the Norwich Bulletin and wrote a wonderful history of Brooklyn, CT. In 1948, the Willimantic State Teachers College hired Juliette Burstermann, the first African American college professor in Connecticut.

In 1988, David Carter was named Eastern’s fifth president. Under his leadership, enrollment grew 40 percent, 15 new buildings were constructed, and Carter made it a point to attract international students. Admissions staff, faculty members and Carter himself traveled abroad to extoll Eastern’s virtues, and students from Dubai, Sri Lanka, Kazakhstan, Sweden, Ukraine and elsewhere were attracted to campus. Health and Physical Education Professor Robert Horrocks set up exchange agreements for students from England, Germany and Canada, and Economic Professor Dimitrios Pachis wrote U.S. Agency for International Development grants that brought 10 students from former Soviet Union bloc countries to Eastern.

Eastern has also welcomed Native Americans to campus, including a number of students from the nearby Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation in southeastern Connecticut. One of the earliest tribal members who attended Eastern was Cora Moore, who graduated from Willimantic State Teachers College in 1943, taught at F.R. Noble School and Kramer Middle School and later became a member and chairperson of the Town of Windham’s City Council. Other Mashantuckets who have attended Eastern include Deborah LaRosa ’97, who works in the Tribal Nation’s Finance Department; Kim Hatcher-White (Peters) ’02; and Benjamin Lopez ’03.

In the past 40 years, a new minority population has emerged. People of Hispanic heritage — Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Central Americans and other members of more than 20 Latin American nationalities — now constitute the United States’ fastest growing population sector. Yet despite their growing political representation and economic power, Latinos have lower college attendance and graduation rates than the mainstream.

To respond to the educational needs of the growing Latino population, as well as to challenges facing other at-risk groups, Eastern has embarked on a multi-faceted program of recruitment and retention strategies over the past eight years.

Using several grants, Eastern has developed an early warning system and appropriate support services to serve students who are academically at risk. In particular, a Nellie Mae Education Foundation “Project Compass” grant and a U.S. Department of Education Title III grant have helped the University to hire additional advising staff; develop a revised, four-tiered advising system; assign faculty mentors; and create a one-stop Academic Services Center (ASC) that provides tutoring, math and writing instructional support for more than 10,000 student visitors a year. While targeting at-risk students, the ASC and related services support all students.

Perhaps the most life-changing initiative introduced at Eastern to provide educational access to those least likely to go to college is the “The Dual College Enrollment Program,” a collabo-
The students take remedial courses at QVCC in their first semester to improve their academic readiness, live in Eastern’s residence halls and participated fully in activities, clubs and organizations. “Living on campus has enabled these students to develop friendships, gain the confidence of living away from home, experience the accountability of peer expectations and develop study habits, while removing them from the influences of the inner city,” Provost Rhona Free has noted.

The program’s first graduates are working as professionals in hospitals and schools or attending such prestigious graduate schools as Providence College. The program has benefited from a variety of public and private funds, including the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, the SBM Charitable Foundation and the U.S. Department of Justice.

With a Latino population three to four times that of the state average, Willimantic is an ideal location for Eastern students — Latinos and others — to give back to the community. In 2011, Eastern launched “Puentes al Futuro/Bridges to the Future,” a local partnership with schools with heavy concentrations of Latino students. “Bridges” is a year-round academic and cultural enrichment program for Windham middle school and high school students, and includes tutoring and mentoring from Eastern students and program support from certified teachers and arts professionals. Students learn cultural dance and music, visual arts, science and participate in sessions called “Yo Soy Latino/I Am Latino” to preserve cultural traditions while encouraging academic excellence.

Eighteen months ago, the Education Trust, a national education advocacy group, announced that Eastern ranked first in the nation in a study of the improvement of six-year graduation rates of Hispanic students in public universities and colleges.

“This is a tribute to the work of our faculty and staff in providing support to students who face a myriad of issues in enrolling in and succeeding at college — language barriers, cultural isolation, financial challenges and lack of family history as it relates to college attendance,” said Núñez.
It is said that necessity is the mother of invention. Year after year the music, theatre and visual arts faculty at Eastern Connecticut State University have found innovative ways to teach, create and rehearse within the confines of Shafer Hall, a building that was constructed almost 70 years ago. As the three departments have grown, their need for a new building that can support the demands of a 21st century curriculum has increased. When the Fine Arts Instructional Center opens on the east side of Eastern’s campus in the 2015–16 academic year, students and faculty will finally have the home that they have been anxiously awaiting.

Designed by the S/L/A/M Collaborative in partnership with William Rawn Associates of Boston, the 118,000-square foot building will combine teaching, performance and exhibit space and will serve to present Eastern to the broader community. It will contain three main performance venues: a 400-seat auditorium, a 250-seat proscenium theatre, and a black box theatre.

In addition to the performance spaces there will be instructional labs; acoustically precise classrooms; scene and costume shops; and other spaces in support of the performing arts department. Design studios for the Visual Arts Department will include printmaking, sculpture, painting and drawing. The building will also have three general purpose classrooms, a gallery and a large foyer perfect for greeting theatre patrons or hosting events, a far cry from cramped and outdated Shafer Hall.

“Shafer has always had a positive energy, warm and inviting,” said Theatre Professor Ellen Faith Brodie, “but the rehearsal
and classroom space is no longer adequate.” The building, which has housed the fine arts for 70 years, has grown obsolete as the programs have evolved. The 90-member concert band performs on a stage built for 30 musicians, while choir practice takes place in a classroom with poor sound quality. Theatre performers are consigned to rehearse in a classroom while their sets are being built directly onstage instead of in a scene shop. Painters work in poor lighting, sculptors create in abandoned gym showers and the printmaking class deals with poor ventilation.

“The excitement has already begun, now that construction is underway,” said Jeff Calissi, associate professor of music and co-chair of the Performing Arts Department. He is excited to have the instruments and space to create more music and is speaking with his colleagues about more complex pieces they would like to perform. It was something that the music department didn’t talk too much about before the groundbreaking, but know that they are ready for.

“It’s coming at a critical time in our progress,” said Calissi. “We have grown so much, I feel we are ready now to live up to the new space.” It’s a sentiment felt throughout Shafer Hall. Over the past few years, new curriculum has been developed in anticipation of the building, and the faculty is eager to be in the new location. The Visual Arts Department plans to seek accreditation from the National Association of Schools of Art and Design following the move, while a new major and two new minors approved this June will attract additional students to the new facility.

With general purpose classrooms and a variety of art courses offered through the liberal arts core curriculum, the new facility will also benefit students from other majors. The faculty foresees greater collaboration among different majors, as the arts overlap with many disciplines. They have always considered the arts on campus to be all-inclusive, with everyone encouraged to lend their talents in the classroom, on the stage or behind the scenes. The center will foster even easier access to these opportunities, both on campus and within the community.

“The new location will promote a broader audience and build a stronger creative community,” said Ann Dawson, professor of art history and chair of the Visual Arts Department. Down the hill from the main campus, members of the three arts departments have felt isolated from the rest of the campus. Their location has limited their exposure, and the level of talent housed in Shafer often goes unseen. With the Fine Arts Instructional Center’s location and welcoming glass façade, the Eastern and Willimantic communities will be able to enjoy a world-class arts venue. “The new facility will provide our theatre and music students with three different performance spaces to showcase their talents,” said Theatre Professor David Pellegrini, co-chair of the Performing Arts Department. “It’s going to be spectacular!”

As construction continues, those in Shafer Hall can’t help but imagine what creating, teaching and learning in the Fine Arts Instructional Center will be like. A place where artists converge and exchange ideas; where students and professors live up to their full potential; where the public is moved by exhibits, concerts and theatrical performances; where the entire campus filters through the hallways to find inspiration; a place where the arts at Eastern flourish.
The annual Eastern Celebrates! festivities kicked off on Friday, May 9, with the classes of 2000 through 2013 reuniting at Blarney’s for Eastern’s fifth annual “Bash for the Past.” While more than 200 young alumni socialized at Blarney’s, members of the Class of ’64 began their Jubilee Reunion weekend with memories, laughter and dinner at Angelino’s Restaurant. On campus, alumni traveled from as far away as Orlando and Las Vegas to enjoy a night of dining and dancing. Graduates from the ’80s and ’90s were welcomed back for a reunion featuring the classes of ’84, ’89, ’94 and ’99 in the Betty R. Tipton Room. In the Student Center Café, former resident assistants came together for a housing reunion.

On May 10, Reunion Day ushered in the return of more than 1,200 alumni and guests. The classes of 1944-1979 marveled at Eastern’s growth while on campus tours and reminisced during luncheons and receptions. Anne (Pisarko) Mahalawich ’44 was honored on the 70th anniversary of her commencement from Willimantic State Teachers College and Ruth (Standish) Swift ’64 celebrated her birthday with members of her class. All classes joined together in the afternoon to support the Class of ’64 as they received Golden Diplomas commemorating 50 years since their college graduation.

The Willimantic State Normal School (WNS) began in September 1889 on the third floor of the Willimantic Savings Institute with a class of 13 young women starting their two-year teacher training program. Class sizes grew from 13 in 1889 to more than 50 students by 1912.
1. Class of 1969 with their Eastern Alumni spouses (Left to Right): Mary Jane Biase ’70, Mark Biase ’69, Jennifer (Griggs) Blevins ’70, Stephen Blevins ’69

2. Class of 1963 (Left to Right): Judith (Tesar) Grenier, Janet (Lachack) DeCarolis, James Forrest, Patricia (Laudate) Adams, Eleanor (Burton) Sutton, Majorie (Stoddard) Swaggart

3. Education Awards Recipient Thomas Giard III and family (Left to Right): Thomas Giard, Jr., Mary Ellen (Davies) Giard ’68, Thomas Giard, III ’96, Ella Giard, Lisa Giard

4. Class of 1964 Reunion Planning Committee (Left to Right): Lucy (Shea) Sweeny, Larry Colvin, Ruth (Standish) Swift, Charles Senteio, Carole (Hinckley) Barstrom

5. The Class of 1964 celebrating 50 years since graduation

6. Education Awards Recipient Teresa (Buschman) Maturino M’05 and Hari Koirala, chair of the Education Department.

7. Class of ’64 members Barbara (Solenzio) Peburn and Jeanne (Tasca) Martin won’t let a little rain ruin the Alumni March!


9. Class of 1979 (Left to Right): Row 1: Unidentified, Carol (Inzinga) Puckett, Joanne Presto, Elizabeth Summa, Carol Duggan, Unidentified. Row 2: Jane (Collier) Sangeloty, Michael Sangeloty, Scott Gabrielson, Dan Tenney, Leigh Ann (Sturgeon) Olinski, Mark Dalidowitz, June (Kolterman) Dalidowitz, Anne Iezzi

In 1895, faculty and students moved up the hill from Main Street to the first dedicated Willimantic State Normal School building. In January 1910 a “model school” opened to provide on-site student teaching opportunities to WNS students.
While reunion classes enjoyed their day, alumni members of Eastern’s chapter of Omicron Delta Kappa, along with founding members Paulette Haines ’94 and Carol Williams, associate dean of continuing education, commemorated the 20th anniversary of becoming an official chapter. Graduates from the M.S. in Organizational Management program enjoyed their own reception and participated in sessions designed to enhance the academic scope of the program.

Eastern Celebrates! ended with the Class of ’64 leading the Alumni March through an afternoon shower to the Big Tent Barbeque. Spirits remained high in spite of the spring rainfall, and members of the Class of 2014 celebrated their upcoming graduation with friends and family, while being warmly welcomed as new members of the Eastern alumni family.

The Early Years • 1889-1914 continued

In 1898, the Willimantic Linen Company became part of the American Thread Company.

Under the new ownership, the plant added mills and a warehouse. On February 2, 1901, the Willimantic City Council voted to build a trolley car system. On August 16, 1903, the line opened.
10. Eastern’s chapter of Omicron Delta Kappa celebrated the 20th Anniversary of receiving their charter with a reunion. (Left to Right): Row 1: Thomas Balestracci ’13, Carrie Mantis ’14, Melissa Nosal ’13, Christina Frugale ’12, Samantha Stevens ’13, Lauren Biatowas ’12 Row 2: Kristin (Smith) Rice ’96, Steve Taylor ’14, Eric Cerino ’14, Sarah Bojorquez ’14, Paulette Haines ’94, Muhammad Malloy ’09, Dr. Carol Williams, Aileen Charland ’06, Angela Carcio ’12, Melissa Groccia ’13

11. The Big Tent Barbeque just gets bigger and bigger every year!

12. Class of 1989 (Left to Right): Gordon Hook, Lisa (Rothstein) Shaw, Tracey (Jello) Boyden, David Horan, Susan Lucas-Deneen, Bonnie (Scanzillo) Kellogg, Christa (Lucas) Shannahan

13. From the left, Randy Hall, Corey Hall, Tara Hall ’11, Marcus Hall, John Cadasse, Lucia Cadasse, Alyssa Petoskey, Indira Petoskey, Jon Petoskey M’14, Startheemar Byrum ’07 all enjoying the Big Tent Barbeque.

14. From the left, Mark Verdone and Amir Pouya from the Class of 1984.

15. A lively group from the Class of 1954 met for their 60th Reunion (left to right): Ruth Rosebrooks, Joann (Boson) Riddell, Dorothy (Elliott) Thompson, Calvin Fish, Naomi (Padowitz) Swartz, Albert Wojtcuk, Lucille (Caisse) Curland

16. Alumni and current student-athletes from men’s soccer had their annual alumni game, ending their afternoon at the Big Tent Barbeque.

17. Jane (Roosevelt) Gold ’64

Streetcars and other traffic added to the congestion and dangers for pedestrians. A footbridge was built over the Willimantic River in 1906 so people could walk from downtown to neighborhoods south of the river.
18. Class of 1994 (left to right): Joanne (Chesters) Gyure, Paulette Haines, Lisa Sme Adams

19. The Class of 1959 celebrating their 55th Reunion (left to right): William Hargreaves, Martha (Scott) Bauduccio, Carl Ellison, Audrey (Davis) Smith, William Gregonis

20. Larry Calvins ’64 greets all the returning alumni at an afternoon reception. More than 500 alumni were expected to return to campus for the weekend’s activities.

21. Class of 1974 celebrating 30 years (left to right): Row 1: Marjorie Laboy-Vagell, Unidentified, Maureen (Carey) McCaffrey, Patricia (Kears) Julian; Row 2: Annette Burton, Kevin Matsil, Katherine (Kelley) Matsil, Terrance Lomme, Lubomyr Weselyj, Phillip Obregon

22. Kimberly (Chalifour) Burns M’14 and her son add their names to the final beam for the new Fine Arts facility.

23. Housing and RA Reunion (Left to Right): Row 1: Kathryn Barnes ’10, Tamara Williams ’05, Beth (Thomson) Sheridan ’01; Row 2: Noah Blocker-Glynn, Matthew Blocker-Glynn ’03, Christina (Martinez) Brown ’04, Shawn McQuilian ’03, Allison Mangles ’07, Kemesha Wilmot ’05

1914-1939 • From Normal School to Teachers College

Principal George H. Shafer began his tenure in 1918, guiding the normal school through the Depression years, and directing the school’s transition to a four-year curriculum, with it becoming the Willimantic State Teachers College in 1937.

Hacker earned his degree in biology at Eastern and went on to Tufts School of Dental Medicine where he earned his Doctor of Medical Dentistry Degree. He practiced with other dentists for three years before buying a Branford practice from a retiring dentist. While running his own practice, he advanced his dental education at Americus Cosmetic Institute in New York City, and was one of the first practices in the area doing cosmetic dentistry. Hacker also travels to Ecuador annually with his family to provide free dental work for poor children.

Kelly double majored in Economics and Public Policy and Government at Eastern. Today he serves as deputy director of securities lending for Bank New York Mellon, and is responsible for more than $300 billion of business activity. He is also Global Head of Client Management, making sure the bank’s clients are satisfied with services provided by the investment professionals he supervises.

Both Hacker and Kelly give credit to Eastern for getting them to where they are today. When Hacker went to graduate school at Tufts, he couldn’t believe he was chosen to be in the same class as people from Yale, Cornell and Harvard.

“Seeing all these Ivy League schools and competitive universities made me nervous about who I was up against,” he said, “but I quickly realized that Eastern had prepared me well. I had a solid knowledge of basic sciences and the team of teachers I had not only got me into one of the top dental schools, but allowed me to compete with other students from universities around the country and the world.”

Kelly says he gained crucial skills from Eastern that helped land him his first job in the field. “I was chosen for a leadership position because of my ability to communicate effectively and my ability to demonstrate leadership experience that I learned from my foundation at Eastern.” He advised students to keep in touch with their networks through Eastern and through their professional ranks. “Become associated, become active within your particular field and have that desire to reach out beyond your comfort zone.”

The “Daisy Chain” tradition started in the 1920s and ended in the early 1940s, with juniors dispensed to Hosmer Mountain to pick daisies the day before Commencement so that the chain could be woven and used the next day.
Eastern continues to bring alumni together throughout Connecticut and across the country to support social and professional networking while keeping alumni up to date on Eastern’s prominent rise as a quality public liberal arts university. Since the fall, events have been held in Willimantic, Hartford, and Middletown, CT; Providence, Boston, New York, Orlando, Los Angeles and San Diego. We might be coming to a city near you very soon!

To receive e-mail invitations to alumni events, contact the Office of Alumni Affairs at (860) 465-5302 or at alumni@easternct.edu, or like our Facebook group “ECSU Alumni Association.”

### ALUMNI EVENTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

**The Book of Mormon Alumni Reception at the Bushnell (left to right): Andrew Zlotnick ’85, Janice Zlotnick, President Núñez, Daniel Diodato ’72**

**Woman’s Lacrosse and Field Hockey alumni reunite during Athletics Alumni Day**

**Boston Alumni Reception (left to right): Katherine Kline ’06, Director of Alumni Affairs Michael Stenko, Edward Mulrenan ’05, Matt Markos ’05, Michael Staron ’05**

**San Diego Alumni Reception (left to right): David Baer, Marie (Karpinsky) Baer ’75 and Cynthia Brandenburg**

**Young Alumni Bash (left to right): Scott Nolan ’12, Audriana White ’12, Rachel Muroad ’13, Taylor Renaud ’12, Nicole McBride ’14 and Rosheka Gray ’14.**

**Alumni and faculty from the Social Work program posed for a photo at the annual “Life After Eastern” reception, presented to assist graduating seniors with their transition to the worlds of work and graduate school.**

### 1914-1939 From Normal School to Teachers College continued

By the 1920s, growth in Willimantic had stalled as the textile industry faced recession. In 1925, the American Thread Company endured a nine-month strike after 3,000 workers walked off the job because of a 10 percent pay cut. By 1932, 26 percent of the state’s workforce was idle.

“The Mechanic’s Store,” a clothier on Main Street
The flood of 1936 and the hurricane of 1938 devastated downtown Willimantic. Despite hard times, the downtown remained busy with three movie theaters, two major hotels and many stores, restaurants and dance halls.