

ECSU honors three with Chavez award

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WILLIMANTIC—Eastern Connecticut State University recently recognized three of its finest members for their distinguished influence on the community.

Earlier in April, the university awarded Eastern student Freddy Cruz, Eastern academic adviser Maribel Sanchez and community member Stefan Keller with the Cesar Chavez Distinguished Service Award.

Chavez was a Latino-American civil rights activist who left a long-lasting impact.

Cruz, who was the recipient of the student award, was distinguished for his consistent engagement with the campus community.

Although he juggles many responsibilities, between serving as the president of Eastern's Organization of Latin American Students, a resident assistant and member of the Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, he doesn't stop encouraging his peers to get involved too.

"Get involved with anything that's going to take you to the next level," Cruz said. "Find those students who might not be where you are and help them elevate themselves."

The faculty/staff award was given to Sanchez.

Working for Eastern's Academic Services Center and serving as an adviser to students who are DACA recipients — often referred to as

Special Neighbor



Cesar Chavez Distinguished Service Awards recipients Stefan Keller, Maribel Sanchez and Freddy Cruz pose for a photo at the recent award ceremony at Eastern Connecticut State University. Contributed photo

I can only hope to be half the person these people are to me and my students.

Maribel Sanchez

"Dreamers" — Sanchez said Chavez was a "universal inspiration" for her.

"I can only hope to be half the person these people are to me and my students," she said about other mentors in her life.

Finally, Keller, a University of Connecticut graduate who works for CT Students for a

Dream, received the community member award.

CT Students for a Dream is an organization that fights for the rights of undocumented students in the state.

Keller continues to work with both students and educators to create more open spaces on college campuses for undocumented students.

"All of us need to move to a place where we see that our world is not going to be what we want it to be without justice for all," Keller said. "Part of that work is educating others."

Eastern President Elsa Nuñez said, because of people like Cruz, Sanchez and Keller, there's still hope for progress.

She said Chavez would have been proud of the recipients.

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