

*Opening Doors To A Brighter Future*

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## CONNTAC, Inc.'s 41st Annual Breakfast Meeting is a Rousing Success

By Grantley S. Adams

### *Always Move Forward.*

With this year's slogan "Always Move Forward", as its inspiration, the Board of Directors of CONNTAC, Inc. held its 41st Annual Breakfast Meeting on Friday, October 24, 2008, at the Four Points Sheraton Hotel in Meriden CT. There was a buzz of excitement and anticipation in the air as the more than 150 attendees signed in at the reception table.

Among those in the audience were Mary Ann Cox, Assistant Chancellor, Connecticut Community Colleges, Dr. Paul Susen,



Ken Armstrong

Chief Academic Officer, Connecticut Community Colleges, and this event's Keynote Speaker in 2007, Dianne E. Williams, President, Quinebaug Valley Community College, Anita Gliniecki, President of Housatonic Community College, and Dr. John C. Norman, Dean of Continuing Education at Northwestern Connecticut Community College and the Recipient of the Friend of CONNTAC Award in 2007.

The highlight of every CONNTAC Breakfast meeting, excluding the stirring musical renditions of Anthony Harrington, is the awarding of scholarships to honor and encourage outstanding students who have overcome tremendous obstacles in order to pursue higher education, and this year was no exception. Ten students, Eduardo Luis Baez, Meriden, Lavanda Bryant, New Haven, Melissa Cartagena, Hartford, Arthur Caudill, Danielson, Chavonne Cook, New Britain, Stacy Desrouilleres, Bridgeport, Marcelino Lopez, Jr., Bridgeport, Minassemma Loukaka, Norwalk, Chanel Matos, Stamford, and

Evelyne Mukasonga, Bridgeport, each received \$1,000.00 awards and their stories of overcoming life's impediments and challenges were as compelling as always.

However, the Keynote Speaker Dr. Elsa Nunez, President, Eastern Connecticut State University took the audience to the emotional summit with her presentation. She described in vivid and heart wrenching detail her own experiences as the first in her family to pursue a postsecondary education and the enormous financial and emotional sacrifices both she and her large immigrant family made for her to fulfill her father's dream that she has "Got to go

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## CONNTAC, Inc's 41st Annual Breakfast Meeting

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**Board Member Dawn Zumbroski makes a presentation to Dr. Elsa Nunez**

to college." She talked about the day she attended her college orientation, which left her feeling so "out of place" that she vowed never return to the campus because she felt, "I don't fit." She observed that she did not dress like the other female students and her student guide completely ignored her after their initial meeting. On returning home, she quickly changed her mind about attending college and "Grew up in 15 seconds," when she learned that instead of buying groceries for the family, her mother had used the money to buy her freshly minted, college freshman daughter, the 'inappropriate' shoes and dress she had worn to orientation. In recognizing

the enormous sacrifice that was made for her, Dr. Nunez "went to college and never stopped or looked back." She now believes that class distinctions present a greater barrier to achievement in higher education that race does, "The issue of class in America is complex, it shapes lives and affects educational opportunity," and she asked the audience to participate in a conversation about the difficulties that socio-economic disparities present to low-income students in higher education. "Students from modest backgrounds face great challenges," she said.

The Friend of CONNTAC Award was awarded this year to Doris B. Arrington, Dean of Students, Capital Community College.

Dean Arrington said that she accepted the Award with "Humility and gratitude" and noted that a friend is one who is held in high esteem and was very pleased to be so honored by the Board of Directors of CONNTAC, Inc. Dean Arrington also reflected on the importance her college education has played in her life, "It was the single most significant aspect of my career."

In bringing the morning's activities to a close, Kenneth G. Armstrong, President of CONNTAC, Inc. encouraged the members of the audience to continue its support of this very worthwhile organization, as it continues to help our students overcome the barriers they encounter in their quest to attain a college education.



**Friend of CONNTAC Recipient Dean Doris B. Arrington flanked by Director Cecilia F. Nugent and Ken Armstrong**

## Maximizing Your Scholarship Search

By Erica Coleman, Lead Counselor



**Erica Coleman**  
Lead Counselor  
Conntac, Inc.

It's no secret that the cost of a college education is enormously expensive. With this in mind, it is important to apply for plenty of scholarships. Scholarships, like grants, are a form of financial aid that does not have to be repaid. However, one does not qualify for a scholarship by filling out the FAFSA. Students must apply for scholarships individually, and they may apply

for as many as necessary. Contrary to popular belief, scholarship eligibility isn't limited to students with high academic averages or those who can demonstrate financial need. Students of all background and levels of ability, new or returning, undergraduate or graduate, can find sources for scholarships.

The only tools needed for your scholarship search are a pen, 10 copies of sample "Request for Scholarship Application Letters," stamped envelopes, and dedication. Try to begin your scholarship search early. The earlier the better! Also, give priority to state, regional, and local scholarships. Most students will have more success with scholarships targeted to a smaller group. Many regional foundations offer a common application so students can apply for several scholarships using one application. Check the guidance office or career center to review listings. In addition, ask parents and

relatives about scholarship opportunities through their employer, church, and/or civic organizations. It is also a good idea to check the college web-sites for potential grants and scholarships when researching schools of choice. Retrieve the scholarship applications from the college's admissions or financial aid office. In addition remember to inquire at libraries, religious affiliations, community organizations, local agencies, and businesses for more scholarship leads. Last but not least, look toward reputable internet financial aid resources for scholarships. Useful sites include:

[www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org)

[www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)

[www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org)

[www.scholarships.com](http://www.scholarships.com)

[www.ctmentor.org](http://www.ctmentor.org)

## 2007-2008 Scholarship Recipients



Eduardo Luis Baez

**Eduardo Luis Baez, Meriden, CT • Attending Middlesex Community College  
Field of Interest: Criminal Justice • CONNTAC Representative: Mashal Ebadi**

*Eduardo Baez is a first-year student at Middlesex Community College. He is the only son from a family of four siblings, headed by a single mother who is dealing with health issues. He is seeking financial aid to help defray his college expenses as he pursues a degree in Criminal Justice. He expresses his appreciation to Mashal Ebadi who helped him make the right decisions in pursuing a college education. His ultimate goal is to earn a Bachelor's degree and to become a police officer to serve and protect his community and make his mother proud of him.*



Lavanda Bryant

**Lavanda Bryant, New Haven, CT • Attending Southern Connecticut State University  
Field of Interest: Elementary Education • CONNTAC Representative: Miguel Peralta**

*Lavanda Bryant is a graduate of Gateway Community College with an Associate in Science degree in General Studies and is currently enrolled at Southern Connecticut State University pursuing a degree in Elementary Education. She is the youngest of seven children and a single mother of two daughters. Returning to school after fifteen years, she is the first in her family to earn a college degree. She is a member of Phi Theta Kappa and was also a member of numerous organizations while attending Gateway. She is a U.S. Army Veteran of Operation Desert Storm. She is thankful to Miguel Peralta for his assistance and for the application fee waiver.*



Melissa Cartagena

**Melissa Cartagena, Hartford, CT • Attending University of Hartford  
Field of Interest: Architectural Engineering • CONNTAC Representative: Nurith Airas**

*Melissa Cartagena is the first in her family to graduate high school and attend college. She has always dreamed of becoming an architectural engineer and is very excited about attending the University of Hartford to pursue her dream. She says that Nurith Airas was the answer to her prayers by assisting her with the financial aid process, FAFSA form, and answering her many questions. She is thankful to CONNTAC for the scholarship and although she is anxious and apprehensive, she looks forward to attending college and meeting new people.*



Arthur Caudill

**Arthur Caudill, Danielson, CT • Attending Quinebaug Valley Community College  
Field of Interest: Engineering and Human Services • CONNTAC Representative: Teresa Gonzales**

*Art Caudill is in his second year at Quinebaug Valley Community College majoring in Engineering and Human Services with a 3.95 GPA. He had put off attending college after graduating from high school due to his inability to pay for his tuition. Through his interaction with Teresa Gonzales, he was able to learn about the PELL grant and the services that CONNTAC offer. At the age of 27, he is involved in community service-based programs such as Rotaract, Relay for Life and Youth Challenge of Connecticut. His goal is to utilize his knowledge and skills to affect change in the world. He plans to use the scholarship to pay for books and supplies.*

## 2007-2008 Scholarship Recipients

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**Chavonne Cook**, New Britain, CT • Attending Manchester Community College  
**Field of Interest:** Diagnostic Medical Sonographer • **CONNTAC Representative:** Erica Coleman

**Chavonne Cook** is a single teen parent, and she knew that she wanted to attend college but she had many obstacles to overcome. Due to her pregnancy she withdrew from her high school and attended the New Britain Adult Education program. Her biggest accomplishment was obtaining her Adult Credit High School diploma with limited support while pregnant. Having an ultrasound done while pregnant, inspired her to pursue a career as a Diagnostic Medical Sonographer. She plans to obtain an Associate's Degree from Manchester Community College and transfer to a four-year college to earn her Bachelor's Degree. She is determined to provide a better life for her daughter. She expresses sincere thanks to Erica Coleman for helping her navigate through the college application process and completing the FAFSA form. She appreciates the CONNTAC program, and she notes that the scholarship will help her pursue her goals.



Chavonne Cook

**Stacy Desrouilleres**, Bridgeport, CT • Attending Housatonic Community College  
**Field of Interest:** Occupational Therapist • **CONNTAC Representative:** Lisa Slade

**Stacy Desrouilleres** attends Housatonic Community College where she is taking Occupational Therapy Assistant (OTA) classes. She has always had a desire to help other people and volunteering in this field provided her the reinforcement that she would like to pursue a career in this area. Upon completing her prerequisites for Occupational Therapist, she plans to transfer to a university to continue her studies. She was often told that the classes she needed to take were hard and she became discouraged, but at the same time she was determined to accomplish her goal. She thanks Lisa Slade for her encouragement and motivating spirit. She has applied to several colleges and has been accepted into Howard University. Being awarded a scholarship will help pay for her college expenses.



Stacy Desrouilleres

**Marcelino Lopez, Jr.**, Bridgeport, CT • Attending Housatonic Community College  
**Field of Interest:** Nursing • **CONNTAC Representative:** Lisa Slade

**Marcelino Lopez, Jr.** is an honor student at Housatonic Community College and plans to graduate in May, 2009 with an Associate's degree in Nursing. Upon graduation he plans to transfer to Southern Connecticut State University and earn a Bachelor's degree in Nursing. While at Housatonic, he has participated in many extra-curricular activities. He is a Student Senator, Treasurer of the Biology Club and the Association of Latin American Students (ALAS) Club, a member of the Multicultural Club and Black Student Union. He is also the Vice President of the Student Senate and Student Representative for the Diversity Committee. Although he was discouraged many times due to lack of parental support and resources, Lisa Slade was very helpful and informative presenting the many services that CONNTAC offers. He was able to secure financial aid to help pay for his education. He is thankful to CONNTAC for their services and guidance.



Marcelino Lopez, Jr.

## 2007-2008 Scholarship Recipients

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Minassemma Loukaka

**Minassemma Loukaka, Norwalk, CT • Attending Norwalk Community College**  
**Field of Interest:** Health Administration • **CONNTAC Representative:** Laura Blackwell

*Minassemma Loukaka struggled through her senior year of high school due to her family relocating to New York during the middle of the school year and she had to commute to Connecticut each day in order to complete her senior year. Attending high school in New York was not an option because she would have been required to repeat a school year due to the state testing requirements. She had to rise each day at 4:00 in the morning in order to make it to class and often times she would be late and required one-on-one instruction from her teachers. She is a student at Norwalk Community College pursuing a degree in Radiology. She credits Laura Blackwell with helping her with the financial aid process. She will be able to use the scholarship money to help pay for books.*



Chantel Matos

**Chantel Matos, Stamford, CT • Attending Norwalk Community College**  
**Field of Interest:** Interior Designer • **CONNTAC Representative:** Laura Blackwell

*Chantel Matos migrated to the United States with her divorced father at the age of nine. They both initially lived with her grandparents until her father moved out and left her in the care of her grandmother. She would like to achieve more than her parents and knows that she will have to work hard academically to achieve her goal of being an Interior Designer. She attends Norwalk Community College in order to stay in close proximity to her family. Laura Blackwell helped in advising her with her college goals, financial planning, and scholarships. If it had not been for the assistance and services of CONNTAC, she did not know how she was going to be able to pay for college.*



Evelyne Mukasonga

**Evelyne Mukasonga, Bridgeport, CT • Attending University of New Haven**  
**Field of Interest:** Dental Hygiene • **CONNTAC Representative:** Lisa Slade

*Evelyne Mukasonga is a graduate of Housatonic Community College and is currently attending the University of New Haven. She and her husband both came from Africa as refugees in 2000. She had to flee her country due to the civil war and lost everything including her parents, brothers and sisters. Because her life was in danger in her native land, she was unable to finish her last year at the University. Her household consists of her husband, four children, a younger brother, and a fellow refugee and her child whom she invited into her home although she did not know her. She remembers how difficult life was for her upon arrival and felt compelled to help someone else. Upon arriving in the United States she decided to finish her education and enrolled at Housatonic where she met CONNTAC Educational Counselor, Lisa Slade. Evelyne credits Lisa with providing guidance and assistance while she became a work-study student and got involved in school activities. The scholarship will assist her in paying for her college education as she continues her studies in dental hygiene.*

## CONNTAC-EOC Lands Client in Prison

By Pat Stamidis



Connecticut Talent Assistance Cooperative-Educational Opportunity Center (CONNTAC-EOC) has been a part of my life since April 1988. I returned

to this country with my two small children, ages 3 1/2 and 5. We arrived with only the clothes on our backs and three suitcases. I had no job prospects or a place to live. I did, however, have a high school diploma and plenty experience as a waitress. At the time, it was far better to be in the United States with family and friends who cared about us than to stay in a very volatile situation. I asked myself, "How am I going to support these children and give them a better life than what I had?" I made a few phone calls and was put in touch with an educational counselor from CONNTAC-EOC who worked out of Mattatuck Community College; now known as Naugatuck Valley Community College.

The counselor was able to help me with all the paperwork of registering for the class, filling out the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) form, and giving me Pell Grant information. In May 1988, I took my first college course in many years. It was a four-credit Biology class. I did not think I would be able to get a good grade having been told all my life that I was "stupid" (first by my father and then by my husband). Today, I realize the detrimental effect these two people

had on my life. Not only did I earn an "A" in the class, but I went on to become a peer tutor through the college's Work Study Program. While at Mattatuck, I received a couple of scholarships due to my hard work and high grade point average. In May 1989 I graduated summa cum laude with an Associate's Degree in Liberal Arts. I was the first person in my family to earn a college degree. What an exhilarating feeling!

My CONNTAC counselor helped me make the transition from Mattatuck to Central Connecticut State University. Naturally, there was more paperwork. He helped me with registering for courses, filling out the FAFSA form and provided me with more Pell Grant and scholarship information. I took five courses each semester and two to three courses in the summertime. I would also take a course during the winter inter-sessions. In December 1991 I completed my Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education and graduated magna cum laude. Wow! Another achievement in my life that I never believed would happen to me. I realized during these years that I was also doing something that would help my children—I was a positive role model for them. They saw me studying. They saw me budgeting my time so that we could spend quality time together (even though there was not a lot of it). They saw me going to all their school and extra-curricular functions. They were witnesses to what is called delayed gratification. I had to put them and my education ahead of me. I had

to put time for myself on hold. I knew in my heart that it would pay off. And, it did.

In February 1992, I received a phone call from my Mattatuck CC counselor who asked if I had gotten a teaching position. I had not. I reminded him that it was February and not too many schools were looking for teachers then. He told me he heard of a part-time teaching position with the State of Connecticut. I asked, "A teaching position with the State? I cannot work part-time, I need a full-time position." He said, "Okay, but it has full benefits." In my head I could hear the sound of just a winning jackpot at a slot machine. Oh, my goodness. I needed to have the benefits for my children. I asked, "Where?" He said, "A prison." I asked, "Are you kidding me? You have got to be kidding!" I did not know they had school in prison. I never heard of it. I interviewed for the position and got it. This was one of the best things that ever happened to me.

I went on to get my Master's Degree and Sixth-Year Certificate and am now a Principal at a men's prison in Enfield, CT. And wouldn't you know, I am still utilizing CONNTAC-EOC services. Every other week, Educational Counselor Claire Gagner comes to the prison to help the inmates with their transition back to society by getting them the assistance they need to further their education. I am ever so grateful to CONNTAC-EOC for helping others and me to fulfill dreams that may not have been possible.

## CONNTAC attends the Annual Policy Seminar in Washington, DC



## CONNTAC attends Annual NEOCA Conference in Washington, DC

### *Letter to the National EOC Association Board of Directors*



I am proud to be one of the Board of the National Educational Opportunity Centers Association's first recipients of the "Shining Star" award. I sincerely thank the Board for the recognition. Each and every one of us that administers an EOC project is reminded that we all stand on the shoulders of very important history. This is an important aspect to the National EOC spirit. I congratulate you on a very successful year of effecting changes recently approved in the President's signing of the Higher Education Opportunity Act.

It is my hope that our association continues not only to be a powerful force nationwide but that we stay together as a close knit group of professionals who are able to lean on each

other during good and bad times.

Sincerely,

Cecilia F. Nugent

2008 "Shining Star" Awardee

