

Opening Doors To A Brighter Future

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CONNTAC Celebrates It's 43rd Annual Breakfast

Meotti serves as Keynote, Dianne Williams receives Friend of CONNTAC Award

By Grantley S. Adams

On the morning of Friday, October 23, 2009, at the Four Points by Sheraton Hotel in Meriden, CT, Michael P. Meotti, Commissioner of Higher Education for the State of Connecticut, and Guest Speaker at the 42nd Annual Breakfast Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Connecticut Talent Assistance Cooperative (CONNTAC) sat and listened to the poignant, uplifting, moving stories of the ten scholarship recipients and he was emotionally touched. So were the other hundred and thirty-seven people in the room.

The highlight of every CONNTAC Breakfast meeting is the awarding of scholarships to honor and encourage



Lawrence Hall at the Podium presenting Scholarships

outstanding students who have overcome tremendous obstacles in order to pursue higher education. This year's event sustained that record. The ten students who received \$1,000 awards and shared their stories of overcoming life's challenges were Anthony Amador, Manchester, Gail Diaz, Bridgeport, Milissa Lebron, East Haven, Mildred Martinez, New Britain, Patricia McGill, New Haven, Rose Morales, New Britain, Ivy Royster, Bridgeport, Andree Thelusa, Norwalk, Rita Walker, Bridgeport and Cynthia White, Bridgeport.

All the scholarship winners were the first in their families to pursue a post-secondary education. In their recounting of their own personal odysseys, Commissioner Meotti heard echoes of his own family's story. He recalled his maternal grandmother, the daughter of Irish immigrants, who did not attend high school, and his grandparents on his father's side of the family who emigrated from Italy and lived on Dwight Street in New Britain. His Italian grandfather attended high school and trade school and his mother became a teacher after attending New Britain Teachers' College. He said that he grew up in a family that perceived that there was a "world of no opportunity" for them. Only two of his five siblings graduated from college.

Commissioner Meotti declared that although – these were exciting times in Higher Education, thanks to President Barack Obama's policies, our society continues to face great challenges. He noted that the President has summoned each of us to work hard in order to increase the percentage of people achieving a higher education. The goal is for more people to succeed because of the government's commitment to create opportunities. The challenge is for them to grab the available opportunities, the Commissioner said. He concluded his remarks by stating that the stories he heard reflect a measure of our success as a society, and suggested that there should be many more such stories told around the country. "The test is not what the very best and brightest can do. As a leader, it's about the stories; it is

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what America aspires to be. Thanks for the stories."

In the audience were several distinguished members of the Connecticut Community College System that included, Mary Anne Cox, Assistant Chancellor, Connecticut Community Colleges, Cathryn L. Addy, President, Tunxis Community College, Grace Jones, President, Three Rivers Community College, Martha McLeod, President, Asnuntuck Community College, Dianne E. Williams, President of Quinebaug Valley Community College, who also received the Friend of CONNTAC Award, and Anita Gliniecki, President of Housatonic Community College. In addition, there were Dr. John C. Norman, Dean of Continuing Education at Northwestern Connecticut Community College, James Daniels, Dean of Student Services at Naugatuck Valley Community College, Doris B. Ar-

lington, Dean of Students at Capital Community College and Kirk Peters, Dean of Student Affairs at Tunxis Community College.

In accepting her Friend of CONNTAC Award, President Dianne Williams spoke about her parents, her father who was a factory worker and her mother who made certain that their four daughters were educated. President Williams acknowledged that CONNTAC has been a friend to her over the years, "It is easier to be a friend to someone who has been a friend to you. I am a friend of CONNTAC because you are a friend of the students."



Ken Armstrong, Commissioner Meotti and Cecilia Nugent: Commissioner with gift of appreciation thanking him for his keynote address during October 23, 2009 meeting



"Praise Dance" dancer Kaiesha Johnson



CT Community College administrators attending breakfast meeting: Cathryn Addy (Tunxis CC President), Martha McLeod (Asnuntuck CC President), Mary Anne Cox (Assistant Chancellor CT Comm Colleges), Grace Jones (Three Rivers CC President), Dianne Williams (Quinebaug CC President, and Friend of CONNTAC Awardee)



Musical selection by student Jared Dixon

Meet Our New Board Member: Dr. Ceylon M. Cicero

By Dawn Zumbroski



Dr. Ceylon Cicero is one of CONNTAC's newest Board Members. She was warmly welcomed and introduced at the September 2009

Meeting of the Board of Directors. Dr. Cicero has quite an interesting and impressive background and brings much energy and enthusiasm to the organization.

Ceylon earned a Naturopathic Doctorate Degree from the College of Naturopathic Medicine at the University of Bridgeport. She holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Chemistry from Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland.

Dr. Cicero is currently a Naturopathic Physician at Natural Practices, LLC, in Newington and serves as an Adjunct Professor at Housatonic Community College in Bridgeport, where she teaches both lecture and laboratory sections for Anatomy and Physiology courses. Dr. Cicero finds time in her busy schedule to tutor and teach students in both the New Britain and Windsor Public School Systems and is a Private Tutor in Windsor for students at both the elementary and high school levels.

Ceylon's accolades include being selected and working as a Minority Fellow at Housatonic Community College during the 2008-2009 academic year, as well as being a recipient of the following awards: the Grant Brett Kappa Tau Promethean

Honorable Mention; Curriculum-Based Honor Scholarship Citizenship Award; and Beta Kappa Chi National Scientific Honor.

In addition to her role as a Board Member of CONNTAC, Dr. Cicero is a member of the Connecticut Naturopathic Physicians Association and the American Association of Naturopathic Physicians. She is also a Golden Key National Honor Society Member.

Dr. Cicero's future career goals include becoming a full-time biology professor, focusing on Anatomy and Physiology. To quote Dr. Cicero, she also would like "to positively contribute to the advancement of science education."

Welcome, Dr. Cicero!

Central Connecticut State University's College Goal Sunday

By Awilda Saavedra-Reasco

The College Goal Sunday (CGS) program was established in CT in 2008 and has expanded from six to thirteen sites throughout the state. In the last two years, CGS members have shown their dedication and commitment to helping students and parents access funding for college. These volunteers go above and beyond the call of duty.

The purpose of this event is to help students fill out their Free

Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form on line. Central Connecticut State University's (CCSU) Financial Aid Officers and CCSU students provide assistance to the applicants. Laura Jakubczyk, CCSU Freshmen majoring in mathematics secondary education stated "I felt it was extremely beneficial to students who didn't know how to complete the FAFSA forms and it was fruitful giving back to the incoming students because I can

relate to them". Also, Eric Vargas, a sophomore majoring in Music said, "Observing the participants' smiles when they exited made me realize what a relief CGS was to them, it was an easy and informative process".

A total of 96 attendees took advantage of College Goal Sunday and 29 volunteers assisted during the event. CGS continues to depend on its volunteers from *(Continued on page 7)*

2009-2010 Scholarship Recipients



Anthony Amador

Anthony Amador, Manchester, CT • Attending Manchester Community College
Field of Interest: Computer/Engineering Science • **CONNTAC Representative:** Claire Gagner

Anthony Amador is the first in his family to go to college. He is presently enrolled at Manchester Community College pursuing an Associate's degree in Computer/Engineering Science. He has faced tremendous obstacles in his life which includes incarceration, and homelessness. While incarcerated, he met Mrs. Gagner who assisted him with his financial aid and his career goals. Anthony says he is grateful that CONNTAC exists in Connecticut and that he met Mrs. Gagner when he did. Were it not for her, his hopes and dreams wouldn't seem achievable. Anthony served five years in the US Navy, he volunteers as a sous-chef, he is a member of the Army-Navy Club, he volunteers writing the newsletter for the Army-Navy Club, and he volunteers to drive for the Disabled American Veterans hospital. His future goals are to complete his education with a Bachelor's degree and reenlist in the Navy to become a commissioned officer. He plans to use the scholarship to cover textbook costs and supplies for classes.



Gail Diaz

Gail Diaz, Bridgeport, CT • Attending Central Connecticut State University
Field of Interest: Social Work • **CONNTAC Representative:** Lisa Slade

Gail Diaz earned her Associate Degree in Human Services from Housatonic Community College. However, she was unable to return to school to pursue her Bachelor's Degree after completing her Associate's Degree. She never thought it would be possible to go back to school after so many years but after speaking with Lisa Slade her CONNTAC-EOC Counselor, she made her realize that going back to school was an option. Gail says that Ms. Slade helped her rediscover and reach for those dreams that had been long hidden on the back burner of her life. After years of being away from school, Gail says she is much older than the other students, but she feels like it's her turn "at the rodeo." This scholarship will "provide me a wonderful opportunity to further my education and reinvent myself as a professional."



Milissa Lebron

Milissa Lebron, East Haven, CT • Attending Gateway Community College & Southern Connecticut State University
Field of Interest: Communication and Business
CONNTAC Representative: Miguel Peralta

Milissa Lebron is enrolled at Gateway Community College majoring in Business and in the fall, she will pursue a Communication degree at Southern Connecticut State University. She says that the hardships we experience in life educate and make us stronger. With the help of her Counselor Miguel Peralta, she was able to research schools and obtain fee waivers. He connected her with programs that assist with family housing and encouraged her to meet with her university counselor on a weekly basis for academic advisement. She feels blessed and is grateful for the CONNTAC-EOC Program.



Mildred Martinez

Mildred Martinez, New Britain, CT • Attending Tunxis Community College
Field of Interest: Nursing • **CONNTAC Representative:** Erica Coleman

Mildred Martinez is presently attending Tunxis Community College with the goal of being a Registered Nurse. She is working toward owning her own home and she gives thanks to Counselor Erica Coleman for assisting her with re-enrolling at the community college. Ms. Coleman helped her with the paperwork necessary for admissions and financial aid. Mildred has overcome many obstacles including being a survivor of domestic violence. Now, she says, "I have recaptured what I had forgotten years ago and see more clearly the importance of pursuing my goals and earning a college degree." She is committed to providing a good life for her two children by being the best role model possible. She plans to use the scholarship to purchase a computer to do her schoolwork.



Patricia McGill

Patricia McGill, New Haven, CT • Attending Charter Oak State College
Field of Interest: History • **CONNTAC Representative:** Miguel Peralta

Patricia McGill entered college at the age of 51 after raising four boys alone; one being a special needs child. Her goal is to teach African-American History. She gives a tremendous amount of credit to Miguel Peralta for helping her choose Charter Oak State College, assisting with her enrollment, and helping her with the financial aid process. She says that he has been her guardian angel. Due to his help, one day she will become the first person in her family to receive a college degree. The scholarship will pay for part of her college tuition and assist to purchase books.

2009-2010 Scholarship Recipients

Rose Morals, New Britain, CT • Attending Tunxis Community College

Field of Interest: Human Services and Criminal Justice • **CONNTAC Representative:** Erica Coleman

Rose Morals attends Tunxis Community College and is majoring in Human Service and Criminal Justice. She has always worked in the community and helping others overcome hurdles is a passion she wants to continue pursuing through education. She says that being a single mother to four sons and having limited eyesight creates barriers in her educational journey. CONNTAC has helped, by making it easy for her to complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) correctly. Any glitches that may have discouraged her were easily resolved with a phone call to her CONNTAC-EOC counselor. "CONNTAC-EOC has been a large part of my life." She thanks Erica Coleman for helping her son prepare for his senior year and helping other members in her family return to college. Rose has earned 77 credits toward her degree and maintains a 3.56 GPA (grade point average). She plans to use the scholarship to pay for books and supplies.



Rose Morals

Ivy Royster, Bridgeport, CT • Attending Housatonic Community College

Field of Interest: Business • **CONNTAC Representative:** Lisa Slade

Ivy Royster is in her fourth semester at Housatonic Community College majoring in Business Management. She has always dreamed of becoming an entrepreneur. As a single mother, she has overcome ovarian cancer and faces severe financial difficulty. Each time she looks at her son she knows, "I have to make a better life for him." She gives credit to her CONNTAC counselor Lisa Slade for guiding her step-by-step in her academic goals and for stressing the importance of education to make her dream of owning her own business a reality. She plans to use the scholarship to pay for books, settle school-related bills, and to assist with an early childhood program for her son.



Ivy Royster

Andree Thelusca, Norwalk, CT • Attending Sacred Heart University

Field of Interest: Psychology • **CONNTAC Representative:** Laura Blackwell

Andree Thelusca is a graduate of Norwalk High School and attends Sacred Heart University. She is pursuing a degree in Psychology. She has been very active in the college's Art, French, Key, and Earth Clubs. She enjoys being involved in student organizations and participating in community activities. After college she plans to get a job as a paralegal and work her way up to becoming an attorney. She feels that her CONNTAC-EOC counselor Laura Blackwell has provided the guidance needed to allow her to understand financial aid. She plans to use the scholarship to pay for books and supplies.



Andree Thelusca

Rita Walker, Bridgeport, CT • Attending Housatonic Community College

Field of Interest: Human Services • **CONNTAC Representative:** Lisa Slade

Rita Walker is currently pursuing an Associate's degree at Housatonic Community College. She admits, "I've made a lot of wrong choices," and is overcoming a 25-year addiction to drugs. But now, she's making the right choices through her growing faith in God and returning to school. Going back to school was difficult. But without help from CONNTAC representative, Lisa Slade, Rita "would not have gone the extra mile." Ms. Slade instilled hope in her when she felt discouraged. Rita hopes to one day run a nonprofit agency where she can help others who are less fortunate.



Rita Walker

Cynthia White, Bridgeport, CT • Attending Housatonic Community College

Field of Interest: Human Services • **CONNTAC Representative:** Lisa Slade

Cynthia White is currently in pursuit of a degree in Human Services at Housatonic Community College. She is a single parent who made a vital mistake that cost her 22 months in prison. While she was incarcerated, she realized that in order to make a positive impact in her son's life she would have to turn her life around. Her future goal is to open up a refuge house for children with incarcerated parents. Cynthia says that having Lisa Slade as her Counselor has inspired her not to settle for a Bachelors degree but to continue with her education to pursue a Master's degree in Human Services.



Cynthia White

Finding Tom Clark

By Tom Clark



Someone once told me that there are three of each of us – the person we see ourselves to be; the person others see us to

be; and, the person we truly are. The purpose of life, I was told, is to seek and find the person we really are.

I recently joined CONNTAC, Inc. with enthusiasm because of the services it provides and the people it serves. I naturally identify with the organizational goals of CONNTAC and see myself in those it serves. Most clearly, I see the counselors providing to people like me the guidance that I did not receive.

Although it seems to be another lifetime, I recall growing up in the Midwest as a shy boy not having a clue as to what my place would be in the world. I had little sense of my capabilities and a frightening clear sense of my shortcomings. Neither my parents nor my siblings attended college nor did they encourage me to attend. I cannot remember many mentors in my life who offered me much in the way of guidance. For example, I recall approaching graduation from high school suddenly realizing that, like so many of my classmates, I should have been submitting college applications. At the last minute and without any sense of direction, I recall going to down to the local community college and mistakenly registering for Accounting classes. Shortly

thereafter, with much embarrassment, I realized I should have registered for general college courses.

Once in college (and in the right courses!) I found success came to me with hard and persistent work. With each success came a greater interest and desire to continue. Ultimately, I found that I had an interest and aptitude for Accounting after all, which became my major, but not my career. Somewhere along the way, my interest in history, my sense of community with whom I shared life and my sense of justice combined and led me to a career in law - both in the United States Navy and in private practice. Finally I was privileged to work in higher education – a place I started as a student and found myself returning as a professional hoping to influence the lives of others as I was influenced.

I recall a somewhat unusual, but important, experience at my college commencement. While the speaker was delivering his/her address, I cannot recall which, my mind wandered to consider what I learned in college. I became frustrated and somewhat depressed as I soon realized that I could not remember much of what I studied so long and so diligently. Of course, expecting to recall the lessons of so many courses was unrealistic. What I have come to learn is that the benefits of a college education are not in learning names, dates, historical events, mathematical equations, etc. Don't get me wrong - they are important, but they are also

available on-line or in libraries. I have found that the true benefit of a college education that is not available elsewhere, is in the judgment and life skills that a person develops – focus and self control, healthy and proper interpersonal relationships, respectful communication skills, critical thinking, creative problem-solving in thinking “outside the box,” taking on challenges, acceptance of personal responsibility and self-directed, engaged learning throughout all of life.

That is, what CONNTAC offers to other first generation college students like me, the support and guidance that we all need to develop the life skills that lead to success in life and, ultimately, to discover the person we truly are. I am grateful for the opportunity to support all of those involved with CONNTAC.



Scholarship Winners

Dr. James Williams Bids Farewell to SCSU

By Grantley S. Adams



Dr. James L. Williams, current Board member and former President of CONNTAC, Inc. retired from Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU) after serving for thirty-six years, in various capacities at institutions of higher education in Connecticut. Dr. Williams was Interim Director of Admissions at SCSU when he announced his retirement in 2009.

Dr. Williams leaves a legacy of accomplishment at Southern. He has contributed to achieving the highest enrollment in the history of the institution, and helped develop recruitment programs that enabled the university to attain the highest enrollment of African Americans and the second highest enrollment of Hispanic students in the Connecticut State University System.

Although he was an Administra-

tor at the end of his career, from 1977 through 1979, Dr. Williams was a Counselor at Greater New Haven Technical College where he was responsible for academic assessments and veterans' affairs. In 1980, as Acting Director of Community and Minority Affairs at SCSU, Dr. Williams served as a liaison between the university and the Greater New Haven community. He initiated the integration of the University's and community's resources, which continues to serve as a foundation for the networking system that is currently in place. One example of this successful partnership occurred during the summer of 1981, when in his capacity as Director of the College Achievement Summer School Program for Disadvantaged Students; he designed, established and coordinated a residential summer program for students.

James Williams later served in many other capacities at Southern

Connecticut State University. From 1985-2005, he was the Academic Coordinator for Student Athletes and was also a member of the University Athletic Board, a policy making arm of the SCSU. Starting in 1988, Dr. Williams was Southern's Associate Director of Admissions and during the same year he was named Acting Assistant Dean for SCSU School of Graduate and Continuing Education.

After completing thirty-six years as an educator, motivator, developer, and leader of results-oriented recruitment programs for academic institutions, Dr. James L. Williams will be sorely missed by those he has helped, interacted with and worked.

However, much to our selfish delight, he continues to serve on the Board of Directors of CONNTAC, Inc. Thank You James!

Central Connecticut State University

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the financial aid offices, higher education, college access programs, and communities who are interested in giving back to fulfill the goal of increasing the number of students pursuing a postsecondary degree. The New Britain High School, YWCA, American Savings Foundation, YMCA, Educational Opportunity Program, (EOP), Connecticut Collegiate Awareness and

Preparation Program, (ConnCAP), Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC), and many more organizations assist high school seniors with completing their financial aid forms.

This spring, the Division of Student Affairs at CCSU invited the Community and campus volunteers to a gathering to thank them for their dedication

and commitment to College Goal Sunday at Central Connecticut State University.

For further details about CGS visit: www.CollegeGoalSundayCT.org or call Awilda Saavedra-Reasco, Director of CCSU's Pre-Collegiate and Access Services at 860 - 832-1905.

CONNTAC is not just about the present and past - we are also part of the future...

