

Events in your area

JULY 13 + 14 Sailfest
Visit the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern CT at Sailfest’s Info Booth on Parade Plaza. Stop by for local information, t-shirts, and more!

JULY 17 Business After Hours at Tamarack Lodge
Join us for an evening of networking as you enjoy complimentary food, drinks, and door prizes at Tamarack Lodge & Indie Glamping Resort.

To register visit ChamberECT.com/events.



The Chamber of “Community” of Eastern Connecticut

Launching people on a personal and professional journey is something the Chamber does well. On June 13, the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut Foundation awarded four high school seniors scholarships. Heading to ECSU in the fall, Alyssa Milette will be studying education and psychology and Chloe Chenot will be exploring several areas before choosing a major. Jayleigh Tefft will study nursing at CCSU and Saphira Dorelus will pursue the same at Three Rivers Community College.

While commerce may be at the heart of the chamber model, the heart of the Chamber is often in its work in the community. The Chamber of Commerce of Eastern CT seeks ways to give back to the region’s residents, often in partnership with our benefactors and members.

“With 1,600 members, there are many resources we can call upon and members we can draw together to accomplish projects that benefit individuals and communities,” said Tony Sheridan, President and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern CT. “We count among our membership over a hundred nonprofit organizations who benefit from promotion and contacts that span all of Eastern Connecticut and beyond.”

While the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern CT Foundation represents significant direct giving in the community—making over \$1.5 million in grants since 2002—the Chamber works to give back in many ways.

Leadership Eastern Connecticut—a program for rising professionals in the region—includes a service project orchestrated and executed by Leadership participants. A \$12,000 project with The Arc of Eastern CT, which trains clients in job skills, provided a shed and



Members of Young Professionals Eastern CT volunteer at United Way of Southeastern CT’s Mobile Food Pantry.

other supplies for their micro business. Leadership volunteers refurbished spaces at Madonna Place in Norwich, which serves over 1,200 people annually with support and education to strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect. Beneficiaries have included New London Homeless Hospitality Center, Our Piece of the Pie, Safe Futures, Reliance Health, and many others over the 31 years of the program.

Leadership Eastern Connecticut takes participants through a sweeping exploration of the region and the forces affecting people through industry, government, military, education, health, and human services. The passions they develop turn into service as many commit to boards or take up volunteer projects with organizations they just learned exist.

The Chamber further supports workforce development through a

partnership with the Eastern CT Workforce Investment Board. Providing the education and training needed, EWIB connects job seekers with positions that need to be filled through the Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative. In the past three years, the program has placed more than 1,000 qualified candidates in jobs. The program now reaches into the high schools with manufacturing-based career pathways that meet employer needs and match students with solid careers upon graduation.

Beyond building the workforce locally, the Chamber is actively partnering with major employers on recruitment and retention efforts focused on quality of life in Eastern Connecticut. Community Concierge, a Chamber program kicked off through a CTNext grant under the Thames River Innovation Place, highlights the social, educational and

recreational opportunities abundant in our small state. Community Concierge creates tools for employers to engage talent and keep them here, from a relocation guide and video promoting life here to outings that expose undiscovered gems and connect newcomers to thriving communities. The program’s success is built on Chamber members collaborating to convey the diverse opportunities the region offers.

Members also show their united approach through generous support of the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern CT Foundation’s fundraising efforts. With \$120,000 in grants in 2019, recipients included the Miracle League accessible athletic field in East Lyme, Safe Futures scholarship for Camp HOPE America, Higher Edge programs for college access and success, Always Home emergency housing assistance, and the Tommy Fund Toy Drive, among 33 others. The amount this year adds up to the highest amount ever donated by the Foundation.

Capturing the spirit of working together, Uniting for United 2019, a summer food drive by the United Way of Southeastern CT, gathered 13,824 pounds of food and over \$6,000. Truly a community effort, businesses across the region were invited to collect donations and meet for a weigh in day where it was better to have put on the pounds. Working with the United Way Mobile Food Pantry is one of many volunteer projects the Chamber’s Young Professionals, YPECT, take on regularly.

Creating opportunities to Connect, Discover and Share describes the Chamber’s approach to supporting its members. It’s also how the Chamber meets the mission where its heart is, giving back to a community that is continually impressive, responsive and growing.

Learning About Region Inspires Rising Leaders

When a local business or organization pops up in conversation and someone chimes in with detailed information about their mission, goals, and maybe even what the place looks like behind the scenes, you might be talking to a graduate of the Leadership Eastern Connecticut program.

“I have been an eastern Connecticut resident for most of my life, but through the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut’s Leadership Program, I was introduced to new individuals and organizations in the community that I never would have been otherwise,” said Class of 2018 co-president Kayla Hedman, Marketing Director at Fishers Island Lemonade. “The knowledge I gained will have a lifelong impact on me professionally and personally, and it is a great addition to my resume.”

Through this Chamber program established in 1987, rising leaders meet the people behind programs, businesses, and organizations who drive economic development, confront local issues, and enhance the quality of life in the region.

The Chamber’s Director of Programs Megan Gilbert has overseen the program for six years and continues to learn about the region’s people, places, and processes along with participants. “This is one of the Chamber’s longest-running, highest-reviewed programs, and it only gets stronger each year. I think one of our past participants put it best: you can’t lead a community you don’t understand.”

Participants directly interact with top-tier executives in the region, gaining valuable insights and inroads to help them professionally. The wide-ranging curriculum highlights the



Preston Whiteway, Executive Director of the Eugene O’Neill Theater Center discusses the importance of arts and culture with Leadership Eastern CT participants.

Chamber’s comprehensive view of many forces that affect the region and educates participants on the factors that may be impacting the success of their own organizations, helping them identify synergies to partner effectively. The emphasis on networking during the program with community leaders and fellow participants, as well as with alumni of the Leadership program, contributes to a powerful web in the region that strongly benefits all involved. Each year organizations see the benefits and support the program through generous sponsorships. The 2018-19 year is sponsored by Atlantic Broadband, CorePlus Credit Union, Connecticut

Hospital Association, Three Rivers Community College and Community Concierge.

“I love my community and my home... the Leadership Program gave me a behind the scenes look at what keeps my home successful, the challenges it faces, and how I as an individual can make a difference and become more involved,” said

Brenton Terry, Senior Accounting Analyst for Norwich Public Utilities, co-president for the Class of 2019.

The two-year program begins with a year of ten full-day sessions thematically organized to explore industry, government, services, and regional organizations. As a class, participants

complete a capstone community service project with a local nonprofit organization. The project builds bonds within the class while they employ leadership skills to leave a lasting impact on the beneficiary organization and the community it serves.

Atlantic Broadband’s Vice President and General Manager Chap Hanley participated in the Class of 2018 and continues to sponsor employees who join the program. He cites the community service as one of the greatest aspects by paying it forward to make a positive impact: “This has helped my team to get connected to the community we serve.”

In their second year, participants plan and lead program sessions for the incoming class, further expanding opportunities to make personal connections with area leaders and demonstrate their enhanced capacity for leadership, teamwork, and communication.

“I learned so much about myself and what type of leader I want to emulate by seeing it first hand by all the great people that were put forth in the program. I was able to take a little piece from each and every speaker and relate it to who I am, the professional I want to be,” summed up Mr. Terry as he reflected on the far-reaching impact of the program.

The Class of 2019 celebrates their graduation from the program on June 19 at the Hilton Mystic. Information about the event is available at ChamberECT.com. Application for next year’s class begins now. Information on the program, selection process, tuition and sessions is available at the Chamber’s website at ChamberECT.com/leadership-program.