

*With pride, respect and our deepest appreciation,  
we present the*

## 2023 MLK BELOVED COMMUNITY AWARD RECIPIENTS

### STUDENT: Deja George '24, Vice President of the Student Government Association



Deja George is a junior, philosophy major with minors in paralegal studies and politics & government. Deja values the UHart community and is dedicated to making it the best that it can be; Deja strives to do so as the Vice President of the Student Government Association, a Resident Assistant, a STRIDE Peer Mentor, a member of the Amplifying Indigenous Voices Affinity Network and a Helping Hawks Service Scholar. Deja plans to continue upholding Dr. King's Vision of the beloved community after graduation by attending law school and becoming a civil rights attorney.

### STAFF: Manny Sanchez, Senior Development Officer in the Development & Alumni Affairs Office



Manny Sanchez, Senior Development Officer in the Development and Alumni Affairs Office, working primarily with the College of Engineering, Technology and Architecture and Hillyer College on fundraising and alumni engagement efforts. He is a Connecticut State Representative in the 24<sup>th</sup> Assembly District. Prior to this, he was serving his 5<sup>th</sup> term on the City Council in New Britain, Board of Directors for Connecticut Foodshare, and coached a travel basketball team. Manny played an instrumental part in erecting a monument and memorial park in New Britain in honor of the highly decorated 65th Infantry Regiment, known as the Borinqueneers, who served in World War I, World War II and the Korean War. The monument/memorial park is the largest on the U.S. mainland. He spends time volunteering in neighborhood cleanups, mentoring youth, and working with non-profit organizations throughout New Britain and Connecticut.

### FACULTY: Dr. Bilal Dabir Sekou, Associate Professor, Hillyer College



Bilal Dabir Sekou, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Political Science in Hillyer College, at the University of Hartford. Sekou was born in Detroit, Michigan. He earned a BS in public administration and governmental economics in 1988 from Eastern Michigan University, and his MA in public administration in 1992 and Ph.D. in political science in 1995 from The Ohio State University. He has been teaching at the University of Hartford since the summer of 2002. Sekou's research interests are race and politics, urban politics, and campaigns, elections and voting behavior. He is a published scholar with articles on social and political participation by African Americans, election reforms in Connecticut, minor political parties in contemporary American politics, and public attitudes toward quality and integrated education in Connecticut. Sekou has provided political insight for newspapers, radio, and television shows both locally and nationally. He has authored or co-authored public opinion pieces published in a range of newspapers in Connecticut. As an engaged community leader,

Sekou has served on the board of directors of a number of organizations working on democracy reforms, and racial, social, and economic justice, including Northeast Action, One Connecticut, DemocracyWorks, Connecticut Citizen Action Group, and the Connecticut Center for a New Economy. Currently, Sekou is a member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., the chair of the board of directors for the Connecticut Mirror, the vice-chair of the board of directors for the Open Communities Alliance, the interim chair of the board of directors for A Better Connecticut Institute, and the chair of the advisory board of Common Cause in Connecticut and a member of the national governing board for Common Cause.

### ALUM: Leonard Epps '90



Leonard Epps earned his Master's degrees in Secondary Education and Educational Leadership from Central Connecticut State University and his Bachelor in Education from the University of Hartford (90'). Leonard attended Harvard University's National Institute for Urban Leaders, Yale University's African Studies Institute, Culture of Peace Program in San Jose, Costa Rica and was a Fulbright-Hays Scholar in Ghana, West Africa. Leonard Epps served as Principal of the Journalism and Media Academy, Dean of Pathways to Technology and Capital Community College Magnet Academy, and as a social studies teacher for 20 years at Weaver High School. He also served as an adjunct professor of African and African American Studies at the University of Hartford. He is a life member of Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Incorporated, founder of The Society of Black Brotherhood, an initiate and drummer for the Yaboo Rites of Passage Program at the Artists Collective, inducted into the 100 Men of Color, and received the University of Hartford Distinguished Alumni Award. He is a recipient of the Connecticut Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission Award.

### COMMUNITY LEADER: Pratt & Whitney



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