



Courtesy photo

Two #Backchat sessions have already been held, with a third planned to include talk about sexting.

#Backchat to give teens, parents chance to address sexting issue

By PHIL ATTINGER
STAFF WRITER

LAKE PLACID — When parent Larry G. Moore attended Monday's meeting on sexting at Lake Placid Middle School, several other parents wondered aloud if they could continue the frank conversation with their kids.

Fortunately, they can, he said.

He and other board members with Drug Free Highlands Coalition initiated #Backchat last spring to give youth and parents a common-ground forum to discuss serious issues.

So far, it has met twice — Aug. 14, 2015, and Jan. 22, 2016 — bringing in 50-70 people to South Florida State College's University Center.

Another #Backchat is scheduled for August this year — right before school, Moore said.

"We cover all things teen," said Aisha Alayande, director of Drug Free Highlands. That includes social media, drugs, alcohol, bullying, suicide, sexual abuse and sexting.

The middle school meeting was prompted by a recent rash of nude selfies and sexually explicit videos created by LPMS students and distributed to other students. The images were brought to the attention of staff and a school resource deputy on Feb. 10.

Principal Chris Doty told parents that the images, because of the way digital devices store data, can never be taken off the Internet. Sheriff Susan Benton explained that under the sexting law, Florida Statute 847.0141, a minor has committed a crime if they knowingly use a computer or other device that can transmit the images to another minor that depicts nudity.

Alayande said at the August #Backchat that youngsters knew sexting can lead to criminal charges, and even talked about "revenge porn" sites where people use old sexting pictures to slander others.

Moore said #Backchat could help parents learn what their children are dealing with, and continue

the town hall conversation started with the Lake Placid Middle School meeting.

"I felt like (parent night) participants got what they needed," Moore said. "I wanted to make sure there are forums (where) they can talk to get information, so Highlands County is healthier as a whole."

#Backchat first divides up youth and parents to talk among themselves in separate areas, Alayande said. Then, both groups meet in one area to go over what they learned and what they want the other group to know.

Where parents found their kids to be narcissistic, she said, teens found their parents to be the same way.

"That communication was lacking," Alayande said.

The only downside with the current SFSC venue is that it's not convenient to Lake Placid teens and their families, so Moore is hoping to team with STR8 UP Youth Ministry to put on a program, possibly using the STR8 UP facility in Lake Placid.

"The idea is to bring it to each city," Alayande said.

The next #Backchat is scheduled for August at SFSC, but anyone who wants to schedule one before then can contact Drug Free Highlands at 863-382-2138 or info@drugfree-highlands.org.

Kin Leatherman contributed to this story. Phil Attinger may be contacted at 863-386-5636, or phil.atinger@newssun.com and followed on Twitter @PhilAttinger.

7 graduate from SFSC law enforcement program

AVON PARK — South Florida State College graduated seven law enforcement officers on Feb. 23, handing them their diploma, challenge coins, and words of advice as they begin their careers.

The class of five men and two women filed into SFSC's University Center Auditorium on the Highlands Campus for the 7 p.m. ceremony and stood at attention while a color guard presented the Stars and Stripes. Family and well-wishers filled the auditorium seats.

Before picking up their diplomas, the cadets, dressed in brown uniforms, heard a send-off speech from a guest chosen by the class.

"Your new public service family is counting on you to raise the bar and raise the standard," said Greg Bubbs, a detective with the State Fire Marshal's Office who investigates fires and arsons in south central Florida.

"Don't be scared, be vigilant," Bubbs told the cadets. "Don't be nervous, be ambitious. Don't be complacent, be tenacious," said Bubbs, who patrolled Highlands County as a deputy early in his career.

He sounded notes of caution mixed with encouragement throughout his

10-minute speech. He told the cadets law enforcement is challenging but, at times, treacherous.

"Your goal is not survive, but to win," he said.

Michael Huften, SFSC's coordinator of criminal justice training, then called up the seven cadets from Basic Law Enforcement Program Class 245 to the stage to hand them their challenge coins, specially minted medallions that signify their achievement and bond as future law enforcement officers. Kevin Brown, SFSC's dean of applied sciences and technologies, presented the cadets with their diplomas.

Graduating that night were: Timothy Duxbury, Crystal

M. Burns, James G. Ford, Eduardo Garcia, Maribel Gonzalez, Salvador Gonzalez, and James S. Sottile.

Huften singled out Duxbury and Sottile for their achievements during the 11-month course. Duxbury earned top honors for his academic excellence and Sottile scored the firearms award for his work on the shooting range.

Cadets typically complete the basic law enforcement course in six months. But this class of cadets enrolled in the part-time option, nearly doubling the completion time.

Ford, who was tapped as class captain, took to the lectern to sum up his fellow cadets' accomplishments.

"We've persevered,"



Cadet captain James G. Ford accepts his diploma from Michael Huften, SFSC's coordinator of criminal justice training.

said Ford. "We've kept full-time jobs, raised families, and made three-hour commutes to reach this point." Ford lives in Port Charlotte and other cadets commuted from Haines City, Glades County, and Winter Haven.

Ford thanked



Courtesy photo

The cadets of Basic Law Enforcement Class 245. From left: Timothy Duxbury, James G. Ford, Crystal M. Burns, James S. Sottile, Maribel Gonzalez, Salvador Gonzalez, and Eduardo Garcia.

SFSC's instructors for teaching the class life's lessons and helping them make it to graduation. Then, addressing his fellow cadets, Ford commanded them

never to forget the motto their class had adopted.

"Fight to the finish," Ford said, with the audience erupting immediately into applause.



Tom Staik/News-Sun

The dining room of the Hotel Jacaranda was filled to capacity as the Avon Park Historical Society gathered to hear a keynote address by Dr. Catherine Cornelius on the history of South Florida State College.

'Our college is like my baby'

Cornelius shares SFSC history with Historical Society banquet guests

By TOM STAIK
CORRESPONDENT

AVON PARK — Dr. Catherine Cornelius steered guests at the Avon Park Historical Society's annual banquet Thursday evening through a journey into the past as she chronicled the history of South Florida State College.

"Our college is like my baby," Cornelius told guests assembled at the Hotel Jacaranda — a college-owned institution — for the annual gala celebrating the rich history of the City of Charm.

"I came in loaded



Tom Staik/News-Sun

Avon Park Historical Society president Rick Helms speaks with Dr. Catherine Cornelius following her keynote address at the group's annual banquet.

because I knew what needed to be done," said Cornelius, who came to the then South Florida

Community College in July of 1984 as president.

Cornelius, aided by an ever-growing

team of world-class educators and administrators, spearheaded

COLLEGE

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a period of rapid expansion.

When she took the helm the school had an annual budget of around \$117,000, Cornelius said.

Four years later, that number had swelled to \$3 million.

During the 1987-88 academic year, student enrollment hit the 2,000 mark — a 100 percent growth over the preceding four years.

"We had more

students than we had room for," Cornelius said.

"That was a good problem to have."

Additional space was rented and a new campus started to spring-up across the heartland with the acquisition of the old Lake Placid High School and the construction of new facilities in Wauchula and Arcadia.

"We were building as fast as we could get money," she said.

Another lasting impact of Cornelius's tenure was the introduction of an Artists'

Series at the college's 1,500-seat auditorium.

The building, she said, sat largely empty outside of commencement exercises a few times a year despite being built in large part by funds raised locally.

That changed in December of 1984 when Cornelius sent staff to New York City to sign a touring production of the "Nutcracker" to come to Avon Park.

"I told them that if we can sell 'Nutcracker,' we could sell anything," Cornelius recalled.

The show sold out all 1,500 tickets on the first day. Thus began what has since become the college's famed Artists', Matinée, Jazz, and Summer series.

"It filled a cultural void here in Highlands

County," she said.

Cornelius, who in retirement still lives in Avon Park, noted with a hint of regret in her voice that the college grew to nearly 3,000 full-time students during her 18-year

tenure.

"We were just 15 shy," the veteran educator said.

Cornelius got a standing ovation at the close of the gala festivities that were rich with Panther pride.

SFSC STEMQuest program promotes academic growth

Special to Highlands Today

AVON PARK — For some three dozen first- through eighth-graders, a Saturday morning in late February was a day without cartoons or backyard activities.

Instead, they were huddled in classrooms on South Florida State College's Highlands campus learning computer programming, what makes sounds waves travel and how air pressure moves objects.

The students from elementary and middle schools throughout Highlands County had enrolled in SFSC's STEMQuest program, a series of half-day classes that introduce schoolchildren to science, technology, engineering and mathematics, popularly known as STEM.

Leslie Comeaux, a STEM coach at Sun 'n Lake Elementary School, led first-, second- and third-graders in a hands-on activity designed to spur children's interest in STEM fields. To teach students how air pressure can move objects, Comeaux guided students in racing inflated balloons tethered to twine across the width of the classroom.



COURTESY PHOTO

SFSC STEMQuest students inflate a balloon in preparation for a race pitting them against their classmates. The teacher chose the race to show students how air pressure can propel objects.

Using a Slinky, plastic pipes and wooden blades, Coral Rivera, a fifth-grade teacher at Sun 'n Lake Elementary School, helped her students explore the scientific principles behind sound and vibrations. One exercise had students fashioning an improvised harmonica made from tongue suppressors, tape and paper.

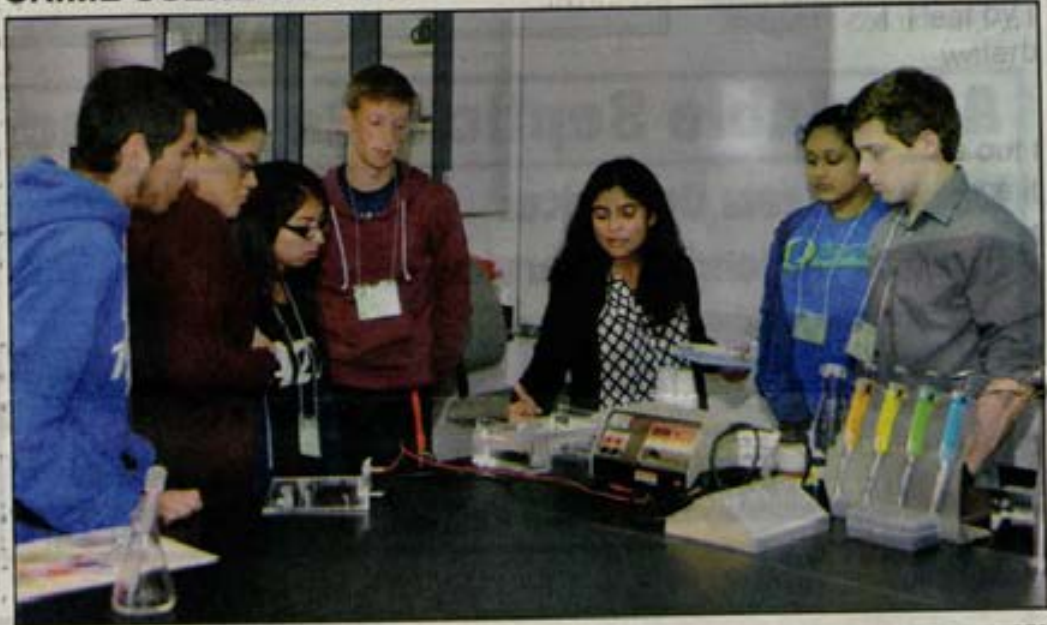
David Zoerb, a mathematics instructor at SFSC, led his group of seventh- and eighth-graders through the basics of computer programming. He took them through the paces of building a web page using everyday software to write HTML code.

"Immersing students in classroom activity centered on science, technology and engineering gives them an opportunity for academic growth," Dr. Kimberly Batty-Herbert, dean, SFSC Division of Arts and Sciences, said.

"Future high-demand and high-wage jobs will be found in STEM-related careers. Our STEMQuest program aims to orient students in this direction early in their academic journey," she said.

For information on SFSC's STEMQuest programs, call Batty-Herbert at (863) 784-7329 or email battyhek@southflorida.edu.

CRIME SCENE TECHS?



COURTESY PHOTO

Descending upon the South Florida State College campus in Avon Park on Feb. 13 were 104 high school juniors and seniors from Hardee, DeSoto, Highlands and Okeechobee counties who participated in the S.T.E.M. Scholars program, a rural science, technology, engineering and mathematics initiative sponsored by the Heartland Educational Consortium. The students had a full schedule of activities, including Highlands County Sheriff's Office sessions covering a day in the life of a crime scene technician and an SFSC faculty-led series about calorimetry, E. coli and Staph, and DNA.

Stidhams win LP chamber's Seeber Award

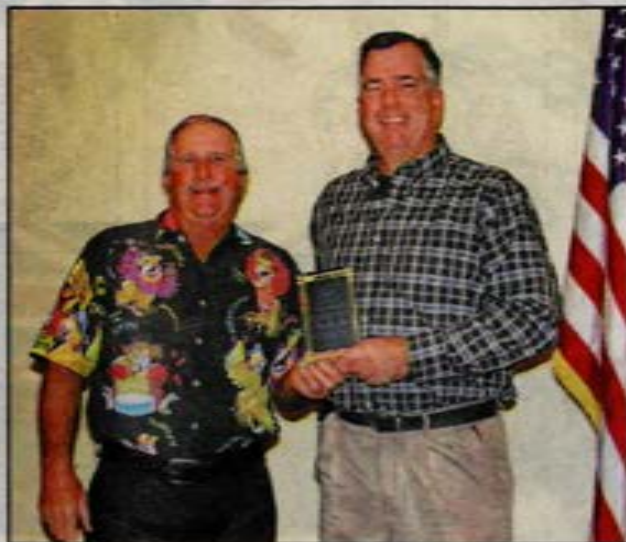
By **MAT DELANEY**
Editor

SEBRING — Emotions ran high when DeeDee Stidham and her late husband, Charlie, were honored with the Harry Seeber Memorial Award at a Thursday, Feb. 25 annual banquet for the Greater Lake Placid Chamber of Commerce.

The banquet facility at Chateau Elan erupted in applause as master of ceremonies Bert J. Harris III introduced Stidham and outlined her family's commitment to Lake Placid. Her parents, Mr. and Mrs. "Doc" Crews founded Lake Placid Drug Co. in 1925 and the family continued the business into a third generation until the business was sold to a corporate drug store chain.

Stidham thanked the chamber for the award, adding "I only wish Charlie was here to share" in the recognition. She concluded her brief remarks by saying she had lived in Lake Placid her entire life "except when I became a Gator (at the University of Florida)" and "I love Lake Placid."

The Harry Seeber Memorial Award is



Mike Eisenhart (left) accepts the Chamber Board Appreciation Award from director Bill Brantley.

named for the first executive director of the chamber of commerce. It is presented each year by Seeber's son, Bobby Seeber.

The evening was filled with award presentations and recognition.

Taking home the Chamber Board Appreciation Award was Mike Eisenhart, director of Keep Lake Placid Beautiful. The Chamber Charger Award was presented to chamber director Michelle Keim. State Senator Denise Grimsley was given the Dal Hall Memorial Award, which honors government service.

Vicki Spires was presented the Outgoing Director Award. The new Genesis Center at First Presbyterian Church of Lake Placid was recognized with the Industry Appreciation Award. The Lake Placid Leadership Award went to Joe Barber who serves as town utility director and is the town's first engineer on staff.

The Outstanding Service to Youth Award went to Eduardo Vega. The Spectrum Award was presented to Jackie and Bill Austin for their Alumni Grill. Sheriff Susan Benton received a standing ovation when



Mat Delaney/Highlands Sun

DeeDee Stidham (center) accepts the Harry Seeber Memorial Award from Bobby Seeber, son of the award namesake. Stidham was accompanied on stage by Skyla Stidham (from left), Andrea Stidham and Dean Stidham. At right is Seeber's wife, Odette.

she collected the Special President's Award. Bill Douglas was honored a Chamber Volunteer of

the Year. It was noted that Douglas is the first two-time winner of the award. The evening concluded

with a live auction led by county commissioner

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The Genesis Center at First Presbyterian Church was recognized with the Industry Appreciation Award. From left are building committee member Mark Fortier, Rev. Ray Cameron, chamber board president Niki Gregor, and Randy Gilde, chairman of the building committee.



Highlands County Sheriff Susan Benton received a standing ovation when chamber president Niki Gregor presented her with the Special President's Award at the annual banquet.

Mat Delaney/Highlands Sun



Honored with the Outgoing Director Award was Vicki Spires. The award was presented by chamber director Anthony Haney.



Lake Placid native Jackie Austin (left) accepted the Spectrum Award from chamber director Anthony Haney. Austin and her husband, Bill, own and operate the Alumni Grill on Interlake Boulevard.



Left: The Chamber Charger Award went home with Michelle Keim (left). It was presented by chamber board treasurer Mary Basso.



Above: Joe Barber (right) was presented the Lake Placid Leadership Award by chamber director Donald Clarke. Barber is the town's utility director and first to hold the title as town engineer.



Bill Douglas became the first two-time winner of the Volunteer of the Year Award when he accepted the honor from chamber executive director Eileen May.



Chamber board first vice president Donald Clarke (right) presented the Outstanding Service to Youth Award to Eduardo Vega.



Left: The Dal Hall Memorial Award, named for a former Lake Placid mayor and intended to honor government service, was presented to State Senator Denise Grimsley (left). Making the presentation was chamber board president Niki Gregor.

AWARD

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Don Elwell. The playful auction raised more than \$1,500 and featured a wood carving of a largemouth bass, created by Sebring Mayor John Shoop; an evening at six Lake Placid area restaurants, chauffeured in an ambulance from Positive Mobility; and a limousine-chauffeured trip to Lakeland for dinner and drinks for eight at The Melting Pot restaurant.



DeeDee Stidham offered emotionally charged remarks after receiving the Harry Seeber Memorial Award. 'I wish Charlie was here with me,' she said of her late husband.



Runners take off at the start of the Panther 5K at South Florida State College on Saturday. Dylan Branch (orange shorts) was the overall winner with a time of 17:04.

Panther 5K run smoothly

Event benefits athletics at South Florida State College

Highlands Today sports staff

AVON PARK — Local runners and walkers took advantage of some excellent running weather Saturday morning for the annual Panther 5K Run/Walk on the campus of South Florida State College. The event is a fundraiser for the Panthers' athletic programs.

It was the youngsters of Avon Park High who ran to victory, as Dylan Branch claimed the male overall win with a time of 17:04, while fellow Red Devil Savannah Oldfield won the female side with a time of 22:41.3. Both were their respective Highlands Today All-Highlands Cross County Runners of the Year.

Jayson Bass captured the Masters title on the male side with a time of 17:37, while Angie Dinchik won the female Masters title in 24:47.3. Chuck Best captured the Grand Masters title in 21:04.2, with Valerie Lee claiming the female Grand Masters title in

32:50.5.

In male age groups, Diego Mendoza won the 8-and-under group in 25:26; Connor McDaniel was first in the 9 to 11 class in 23:02.3; and Matthew Andrews won the 12 to 14 class in 22:36.1.

In the 15 to 19 class, Damian Foster was first in 18:10.9 and Matthew Schult won the 25 to 29 class in 19:21.

Jeremy Vincent captured the 30 to 34 division in 23:56; John McDaniel won the 35 to 39 class in 19:45.9; Shannon Peacock was first in the 40 to 44 class in 29:15.3; and Lynn Phelps took the 45 to 49 group in 52:46.5.

Michael Austin won the 50 to 54 group in 35:28.4, James Hawker placed first in the 60 to 64 class with a time of 24:06.3 and Michael Stewart won the 65 to 69 class in 23:53.7.

Roderick Matthews was first in the 70 to 74 class in 27:45.8; Harold Smith won the 75 to 79 class in 46:55.8 and Kenneth Filppula took the 80-and-over class in 47:23.3.



ALLEN MOODY/STAFF

South Florida State College Athletic Director Rick Hitt gives instructions prior to the start of Saturday's Panther 5K.

Run

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In female age groups, Jordan McDaniel won the 8-and-under group in 41:51.6; Abby Peacock won the 9 to 11 class in 29:14.9; VEDI Persad was first in the 12 to 14 class in 30:23.6; and Lindsey Leitzel was first in the 20 to 24 class in 48:00.

Tabitha Swartz took the 25 to 29 division in 30:52.5; Latosha Harnage won the 30 to 34 class in 30:54.8; Laura Andrew was first in the 35 to 39 class in 29:03; and Leslie Mahoney won the 40 to 44 class in 25:46.1.

In the 45 to 49 class, Edsel Kromholz was first in 32:02.7; Jennifer Glassburn was first in the 50 to 54 class in 25:04.9; Denise Grimsley was first in the 55 to 59 class in 33:21.5; and Ann Frakes won the 60 to 64 class in 34:58.2.

Deborah Fuschetti won the 65 to 69 class in 34:17 and Lois Hotchkiss won the 75 to 79 class in 35:00.

The next big event will be Saturday's



ALLEN MOON/STAFF

The Panther 5K Run/Walk at South Florida State College gets started Saturday.

Run the Track at Sebring International Raceway at 7 p.m. Entry forms can be found online at www.sebringraceway.com.

SFSC plans IT open forum March 31

Special to the News-Sun

AVON PARK — Heartland residents looking to start a new career are invited to an open forum showcasing information technology programs at South Florida State College.

The open forum is set for March 31, 6 p.m., on SFSC's Highlands Campus, Avon Park, in the Public Safety Building, room CC-100.

Prospective students will learn about four of SFSC's XCEL-IT programs, which prepare graduates for high demand jobs in information technology. At the open forum future students will explore XCEL-IT's digital forensics program. Students completing this one-year program learn how to find and trace data embedded in digital devices, leading to a career as a digital

forensics investigator.

Another one-year program will prepare students for careers in network security. The program teaches students the fundamental skills for securing computer networks from hacking, internet attacks, and other malicious exploits.

Students eager to complete a shorter course can look into the IT Help Desk college credit certificate program.

This six-month program teaches students the skills to answer questions about or resolve hardware, software, and security issues, either in an office setting or remotely. The open forum will also feature the XCEL-IT network systems technology program. Students completing this two-year program leading to an associate degree will know how to manage networks and provide desktop support,

while specializing in network security or digital forensics.

Those attending the open house will have an opportunity to speak to IT experts working in these career fields. They can also meet with an adviser to discuss program entry requirements and employment opportunities.

The U.S. Department of Labor is funding the XCEL-IT program through a grant, so

some students may be eligible for additional benefits.

Visitors will find the Public Safety building on the north side of West College Drive. Take Entrance 7 or 8 to reach the building.

For more information, call 784-7439 or email xcel-it@southflorida.edu.

Visit www.southflorida.edu for more information on the XCEL-IT program and a campus map or directions.

STARS enjoy special night with SFSC coach

SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-SUN

AVON PARK – Special STARS athletes in Highlands County got to see some big-time baseball talent last Friday night when they watched the South Florida State College Panthers maul Southeastern University of Lakeland 11-0.

It marked SFSC baseball coach Rick Hitt's 500th win at the school and the Special STARS athletes were excited to be there to help him celebrate.

Special STARS kicked off their night with a tailgating party where they enjoyed food served outdoors under the shade.

SFSC's mascot, Pete the Panther, came to the tailgating party to welcome all the athletes and pose in pictures. He even signed a few autographs with his paw.

Special STARS athletes all received free SFSC baseball hats at the game. STARS Recreation Club President Jonathan Dickman threw out the first pitch.

"I was very nervous, but I did it," Dickman said.



Courtesy photos

Special STARS athletes cheer the SFSC Panther baseball team to victory last Friday night in Avon Park.



SFSC baseball player Austin Haworth hands out free baseball hats to Special STARS athletes John Smith and Timmy Cypress last Friday night.

After the game, many of the athletes went

down on the field to run around the bases

with the SFSC baseball players.



Special STARS athlete Joshua Conner is all smiles meeting "Pete the Panther," South Florida State College's mascot, during the STARS tailgating party before the baseball game last Friday.



Special STARS Recreation Club president Jonathan Dickman of Sebring prepares to throw out the first pitch of the South Florida State College-Southeastern University baseball game last Friday.

Links2Success hosts college/career bonanza

SUBMITTED BY ASC
CONSULTING AND MARKETING

Links2Success held their third annual College and Career Prep Bonanza Feb. 24 for DeSoto County High School juniors and seniors. This year's event had nearly 150 students attend and take advantage of the college and career readiness resources available.

Workshops were presented by South Florida State College, the DeSoto County Education Foundation and Suncoast Credit Union. Topics covered included an overview of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, applying to college, paying for college, financial literacy and more.

In addition, several organizations and businesses were on hand to provide students with information on careers in

DeSoto County, as well as local scholarship and post-secondary educational opportunities.

The event is part of Links2Success' College and Career Readiness Initiative. Held at the Turner Center, students earned raffle tickets for prizes by attending workshops and winning games. The event boasted a money machine, photo booth, Plinko-style game and more. Senior Juan Valdovinos won a \$500 scholarship sponsored by Peace River Citrus Products.

Links2Success would like to thank all of the organizations, employers, volunteers and other partners for their help in making this a successful event.

The College and Career Prep Bonanza was made possible through contributions from Links2Success' Community Sponsors: Peace River Citrus Products;



PHOTOS PROVIDED

Gulfcoast South AHEC; Sisters of Charity BVM; Community Foundation of Sarasota County; ASC Consulting and Marketing; Gulf Coast Community Foundation; Walmart Distribution; Walmart Supercenter; Jai T. Whitlock-Harris; Mosaic; Mason G. Smoak Foundation; First State Bank of Arcadia; Correct Care; FPL; Rotary; Rep. Ben Albritton; Public; Sunbulb; Tremron; United Way Suncoast; The Chad Lubben Mortgage Group; Canoe Outpost; Arcadia Computer; DeSoto Memorial Hospital; and Suncoast Credit Union.

Thank you to our community partners for providing college and career advice to DeSoto County Students: First State Bank of Arcadia, Suncoast Technical College, Suncoast Credit Union, South Florida



State College, Walmart, Family Service Center, DeSoto County Education Foundation and the Arcadia Police Department

Links2Success is a local non-profit founded in 2012 by DeSoto County alumni. The nonprofit provides college and

career prep programming for DeSoto County students free of charge. For more information on their programs and sponsorship opportunities, visit www.links2success.org or contact Ashley Coone at 990-0527.



Hardee Countians Take On Panther 5K

The South Florida State College Foundation held its seventh annual Panther 5K Run/Walk on Saturday, attracting 95 runners and walkers to the Highlands Campus in Avon Park.

The \$3,725 in proceeds will benefit SFSC's athletics programs.

The 5K included runners and walkers ages 8 through 86; children in strollers, pushed around the course by moms and dads; and canine companions and their owners. SFSC's mascot Pete the Panther greeted 5K participants and encouraged tired runners as they approached the finish line.

This year's Panther 5K Run/Walk was won by 14-year-old Dylan Branch, who navigated the race in 17 minutes, 4 seconds. Branch was also the winner of last year's Panther 5K. The overall women's winner was 16-year-old Savannah Oldfield with a time of 22 minutes, 41.3 seconds. Male and female Master winners were Jayson Bass, 17:37.0, and Angie Dinchik,

24:47.3. Grand Master winners were Chuck Best, 21:04.2, and Valerie Lee, 32:50.5.

Women's Division Finalists:
Age 8 and Under: first, Jordan McDaniel, 41:51.6

Age 9-11: first, Abby Peacock, 29:14.9; second, Hana Piety, 42:40.1; third, Gracyn Thomas, 43:17.1

Age 12-14: first, Vodi Persad, 30:23.6; second, Sara Piety, 47:31.3; third, Angela Eaton, 51:32.6

Age 20-24: first, Lindsey Leitzel, 48:00.0; second, Heather Oyola, 48:13.8; third, Patricia Quinn, 50:58.7; fourth, Katherine Oyola, 51:35.1

Age 25-29: first, Tabitha Swartz, 30:52.5

Age 30-34: first, Latosha Harnage, 30:54.8; second, Teresa Mendoza, 34:13.4; third, Mary von Merveldt, 42:53.9; fourth, Desiree Vincent, 44:32.5

Age 35-39: first, Laura Andrews, 29:03.0; second, Melissa Hernandez, 30:29.8; third, Tara Huften, 39:06.2; fourth, Ketus Thomas, 45:18.7; fifth, Laura Simmons, 51:40.9

Age 40-44: first, Leslie Mahoney, 25:46.1; second, Theresa Juliano, 26:14.4; third, Sharla Elliot, 27:18.3; fourth, Sandy Meeks, 29:19.1; fifth, Niki Gregor, 33:10.2; sixth, Mary Beth Przychocki, 36:42.3

Age 45-49: first, Edsel Kromholz, 32:02.7; second, Cyndi Dassinger, 38:43.1; third, Kathy Collier, 52:55.2

Age 50-54: first, Jennifer Glassburn, 25:04.9; second, Lisa Foster, 25:42.8; third, Maria Sutherland, 30:39.4; fourth, Elaine Daff, 31:56.3; fifth, Andrea Stidham, 37:20.2; sixth, Lisa Jarrett, 46:26.7; Lena Phelps, 52:46.5

Age 55-59: first, Denise Grimsley, 33:21.5; second, Brenda Johnston, 36:16.4; third, Gerilyn Brannan, 36:26.3; fourth, Pamela Gentry, 44:18.8; fifth, Nancy Leitzel, 48:02.0; sixth, Cathy Lewis, 48:39.2; seventh, Cindy Rose, 51:39.1

Age 60-64: first, Ann Frakes, 34:58.2; second, Bonnie Potter, 37:59.7; third, Pat Engelhardt, 48:09.4; fourth,

Dawn Pisarski, 51:56.7

Age 65-69: first, Deborah Fuschetti, 34:17.0; second, Gaylin Thomas, 47:32.3

Age 75-79: first, Lois Hotchkiss, 35:00.0; second, Audrey Smith, 41:31.3

Men's Division Finalists:
Age 8 and under: first, Diego Mendoza, 25:26.0; second, Xavier Swartz, 27:14.1; third, Rylan Thomas, 33:45.1; fourth, Anden Thomas, 36:37.1; fifth, Ryder Thomas, 38:52.5; sixth, Garrett von Merveldt, 40:04.0; seventh,

Nicholas Lynch, 41:23.5
Age 9-11: first, Connor McDaniel, 23:02.3; second, Austin Ulm, 26:57.9; third, Daniel Lynch, 29:12.0

Age 12-14: first, Matthew Andrews, 22:36.1; second, Adam Eaton, 51:43.9

Age 15-19: first, Damian Foster, 18:10.9

Age 25-29: first, Matthew Schult, 19:21.0; second, Charley Wright, 35:44.6; third, Sid Jarrett, 45:52.4

Age 30-34: first, Jeremy Vincent, 23:56.0; second, Josh

Rodriguez, 24:15.5

Age 35-39: first, John McDaniel, 19:45.9; second, Jason True, 24:10.5; third, Antonio Vasquez, 24:45.8; fourth, Mike Huften, 39:06.2

Age 40-44: first, Shannon Peacock, 29:15.3; second, John Collier, 33:27.5

Age 45-49: first, Lynn Phelps, 52:46.5

Age 50-54: first, Michael Austin, 35:28.4; second, Roger Rhodes, 43:31.2; third, Lee Phelps, 52:48.3

Age 55-59: first, Randy Grice, 22:06.1; second, Bill Jarrett, 25:43.6; third, Darrell Jensen, 25:48.6; fourth, Ran-

dall Wilkins, 29:10.6; fifth, Raymond Hancock, 33:21.1; sixth, Edwin Gerardo Serrano, 38:29.7; seventh, Tom Leitzel, 48:01.0

Age 60-64: first James Hawker, 24:06.3; second, Joe Wright, 24:30.1; third, Randy Severn, 26:10.4

Age 65-69: first, Michael Stewart, 23:53.7; second, Charlie Potter, 28:07.6

Age 70-74: first, Roderick Matthews, 27:45.8; second, Clifford Ables, 35:11.1

Age 75-79: first, Harold Smith, 46:55.8

Age 80 and over: first, Kenneth Filppula, 47:42.3



COURTESY PHOTO

Ninety-five runners and walkers start the Panther 5K on Saturday.

Doctor 'Retires' Into Second Career

Dr. Christopher McConnell has to stay busy — even in retirement.

After three decades of practicing internal medicine, he grew weary of the business end of medicine and retired. Still, the Wauchula resident could not imagine a life on the links or lounging by the pool. He had a need to work.

To fulfill that need, McConnell found a second career teaching science at South Florida State College. He is now entering his ninth year teaching human anatomy and physiology to aspiring nurses, radiologists and biologists.

"I am going to keep working until I drop," McConnell said from his office on SFSC's Highlands Campus. "As long as I am useful, I'll keep teaching here."

His journey to college science classrooms came about from a knock on the door. "After leaving my practice, I took up piano lessons to keep myself engaged and busy," he said. But after several years of lessons, he acknowledged, "I didn't have it in me to play music."

Thinking he might have an aptitude for art and eager to find something to do, he knocked on the door of SFSC art professor Cathy Futral. "I never did art before, so I asked Cathy if I could audit her drawing class."

Futral said she advised him to start with a basic drawing class, which he did.

"As you might imagine, combining the scientific mind with his keen perceptual skills, the artistic talents of Dr. McConnell took off," Futral said. "Students, and his teacher, were inspired and impressed by his technically beautiful and well-crafted creations."

Indeed, visitors to his office will find several large detailed drawings of anatomical subjects that appear to be reproductions from "Gray's Anatomy," the iconic textbook on human anatomy.

"No, they are all my drawings," he said. "I don't exhibit them at shows or sell them. I do the drawings for my own pleasure." He also draws portraits and paints with acrylics.

McConnell was so taken by drawing that he hoped he might land a position teaching at SFSC. A move, he hoped, that would keep him busy. But he said the department was already fully staffed. Then came word of an opening for a part-time anatomy instructor at the college.

"It was a perfect fit me," he said. "I had taught anatomy during the summers while wrapping up my medical studies."

McConnell specialized in hematology and oncology, and practiced in St. Petersburg for

the next 30 years.

"I worked at a large clinic and left when it was sold to a corporation," he said. "I moved to a 20-acre spread in Wauchula and commuted back to the coast for two years, where I worked at the Veterans Administration Hospital."

Then came retirement.

Ever needing something to keep him busy, McConnell raised fainting goats. "Yes, they are goats that faint when startled," he said. He explained the goats have a genetic disorder that causes their muscles to stiffen when they feel panicked. "It's painless and they recover in a few seconds," he explained.

But caring for fainting goats and making art weren't enough to keep him occupied. After one year of teaching anatomy part-time, he was hired to teach full-time, much to his delight. "You can't go from being a busy doctor to doing

nothing," he said.

He carries a full load of classes, even commuting two

days each week to SFSC's Lake Placid Center to teach.

Work is not the only thing that fascinates him. He reports a happy marriage to Lisa McConnell, a nursing instructor at SFSC.

"I still draw but not as much now that I have a full teaching load," McConnell said.

Full load or not, Dr. McConnell says he could still do more. "I'd teach more classes if they let me," he said.



COURTESY PHOTOS

Dr. Christopher McConnell works one-on-one with an anatomy student at South Florida State College.

Indian Mound Artifacts Given To SFSC Museum

A collection of archeological artifacts held in private hands for decades now has found a home at South Florida State College's Museum of Florida Art & Culture.

The assortment of beads, jewelry and ornamentals was unearthed 50 years ago by Leon and Nona Hurtado. The couple dug the items from a burial mound constructed by Native Americans, most likely the Calusa tribe, on the north shore of Lake Josephine.

Nona Hurtado, now 88, arranged to have the items donated to MOFAC with the help of a family friend. The Hurtado family had kept the collection at their home, making it available occasionally to an expert or interested amateur.

"It's time these items found a home after all these years," said Hurtado, who now lives in Punta Gorda. "They've been sitting in a box in my house since the '60s, so I thought now it is the time they were put on display."

The Calusa tribe inhabited settlements throughout south-west Florida, including Highlands and Hardee counties. Archeologists trace the tribe's origins to 5,000 B.C.

The donated items, some older than 600 years, were dug

from a Native American burial site that came to be known as the Goodnow Mound, which was first excavated by archeologists John W. Griffin and Hale G. Smith in 1947. The project ended for lack of funds.

In 1964, the Hurtado family was visiting the initial dig site and noticed burrowing ants were ferrying tiny seed beads to the surface. Fascinated by what they found, and learning of the site's history, the couple got permission to dig the mound anew.

"My husband served 30 years in the Navy as an engineer," said Hurtado. "So he built a conveyor belt and we started digging the mound to see what might lie hidden."

The couple, along with their children, shifted through dirt, finding hundreds of glass beads, two silver tablets and ornamental items that would have been used by a tribal chief as a ceremonial shield. The Hurtado family also acquired a lead tablet.

"This lead tablet is absolutely amazing," said Anne Reynolds, with the Kissimmee Valley Archaeological & Historical Conservancy, who was on hand last year as the artifacts were examined upon their arrival at MOFAC.

"Only two other tablets like this have ever been analyzed," said Reynolds, who helped arrange for a similar donation to MOFAC of items that had been excavated from a nearby archeological dig, the Blueberry site outside Lake Placid.

"We have arranged for a special viewing case for this collection," said Mollie Doctrow, the museum's curator since 2005. "This is a particularly special donation and it will not only complement our existing exhibits but add to our understanding of the tribes that inhabited this region."

Doctrow said some of the most important items are now on display for public viewing in MOFAC's main gallery, which is housed on SFSC's Highlands Campus. More items will go on display after the installation of additional display cases. She said the collection will be made available for researchers to study.

After signing the deed transferring ownership of the collection to MOFAC, Hurtado examined display cases containing arrowheads, jewelry and tools from other archeological excavations in the museum's collection.

"I am happy to see my collection has found such a good home," said Hurtado.



COURTESY PHOTOS

A selection of Goodnow Mound artifacts now in a public display case at the Museum of Florida Art & Culture in Avon Park. They are believed to have been left by Calusa Indians, who once roamed Hardee and Highlands counties.



Nona Hurtado, 88, and Mollie Doctrow (right) in the gallery of South Florida State College's Museum of Florida Art & Culture. The Hurtado family had dug the artifacts from an Indian mound in the 1960s.

SFSC Will Close For Spring Break

South Florida State College will close Sunday, March 13, through Sunday, March 20, for Spring Break.

The college will reopen on Monday, March 21.

During the one-week break, new students can still apply for admission online by visiting SFSC's home page at *south-florida.edu*. Returning students can register for summer term classes through Panther Central.

The scholarship application deadline for the summer term is March 15. Students can apply for scholarships online by clicking the "scholarships" tab.

The summer term begins May 6.

Graduation Nears For SFSC's Inaugural Firefighting Class

Firefighters have played a storied role in American society. Few professions can match the esteem with which firefighters are held by the public.

Heartland residents can now turn to South Florida State College to earn the credentials needed to work as a career firefighter in Florida. SFSC launched its fire science program in the fall, enrolling 11 recruits.

They will graduate in April. The Florida Legislature, at the urging of state Sen. Denise Grimsley, appropriated \$2.6 million in 2014 for SFSC to refit existing classroom space, build a water and fire tower, and acquire the equipment to open a firefighting program on the Highlands Campus.

"Our fire science program was a dream of our community that was a long time in the making," said Kevin Brown, dean of applied sciences and technologies. "We've received tremendous support from the community getting this program up and running, including essential equipment from the Hardee County Commission and the city of Frostproof."

SFSC wrapped up the construction and hired instructors in time to enroll the inaugural class in September 2015.

In November, the state Fire Marshal's Office gave SFSC's program its stamp of approval, placing it on Florida's list of approved recruit training

providers. SFSC now joins 42 training providers across the state in offering the two-part course.

And in early April, the program will mark its first class of graduates.

The state requires career firefighter recruits to complete a two-part training program. The initial 206-hour phase of the course covers the fundamental knowledge and skills to work as a member of a firefighting team, permitting graduates to work in a volunteer fire department. A second 192-hour course gives recruits the added skills set to work as career firefighters in a county or city fire department.

Prior to SFSC starting its program, area residents had to travel to Bradenton, Tampa or Winter Haven to enroll in the complete state-approved course.

Eric Hanks, an adjunct instructor, was at the new fire science training site recently with the 11 recruits, teaching them how to breach a shuttered door. When not on campus, he commutes to Boca Raton to put in a 24-hour shift with that city's 216-member fire department.

"These folks are going a great job," said Hanks, who is also a certified paramedic. "They're like sponges; they soak up everything we teach."

The 11 recruits, four of whom are women, represent a range of backgrounds. Some are career paramedics looking

to move into firefighting. One, only a few years out of high school, wants to fulfill his dream of fighting fires. Two recruits are married to each other.

Wauchula resident Cole Choate, a 20-year-old graduate of Hardee Senior High School, is looking to start a career in firefighting.

"Right now I am just eager to graduate so that I can get in with a fire department," said Choate. "I hope it's a local department, but that's not necessary."

The class trains with the latest technology to mimic real-life situations. Recruits practice firefighting techniques in a 44-foot-tall fire tower that simulates structure fires, including a stove fire with flashover. They learn hose pulling and team work using two fire engines, each of which has seen service with area fire departments.

Entry into SFSC fire science program requires candidates to have a high school diploma or its equivalent, pass a background check, and demonstrate a level of physical fitness needed to carry hoses, saw through a roof, and pull an injured person to safety.

To learn more about SFSC's fire science program, call Steve Ashworth at (863) 784-7272 or e-mail ashworths@southflorida.edu. Information on the program is available online at the "degrees and programs" link at southflorida.edu.



COURTESY PHOTO

Student Cole Choate, of Wauchula, wields an axe to breach a metal door in a simulated forced entry during a recruit training session.

Tours give glimpse into rare local shrub

At SFSC's Wildflower Wayside Shrine Trail

Special to Highlands Today

AVON PARK — Walking under a sun-drenched sky with a stiff wind in their faces, five visitors to South Florida State College's Wildflower Wayside Shrine Trail set out in search of wildflowers blooming in the warmth of spring.

Following the guide, SFSC librarian Claire Miller, the group snaked its way through the quarter-mile trail. Within minutes, participants chanced upon a light-blue flower nestled among the powder puff lichen hugging the ground.

"Look, it's a blue-eyed grass," said one, comparing the flower to the picture in her printed guide. "Yep, that's what it is," said Miller. "Now let's see if we can find the pygmy fringe tree."

The group was just one of several that came out to SFSC's

Highlands Campus for the Pygmy Fringe Tree Wildflower Festival March 10.

Now in its third year, the festival, hosted by the college's Museum of Florida Art and Culture (MOFAC), coincides with the flowering season of the pygmy fringe tree, which was almost driven to extinction by development.

Known also as *Chionanthus pygmaeus*, the now rare flowering shrub grows between 3 and 6 feet tall. The shrub garnered the affection of wildflower enthusiasts for its stunning flowers that appear in early spring. The federal government declared it endangered in 1987.

Getting closer to the site where a pygmy fringe tree grows, Miller pointed to the fine white sand that blankets the trail. "If you come out early in the morning, you can spot the paw prints of otters who inhabit the nearby lake," she said.

The trail winds its way along the north side West College



COURTESY PHOTO

SFSC librarian Claire Miller and student Kurt Estinoso check out the Wildflower Wayside Shrine Trail.

Drive, about 200 feet from the shore of Lake Lelia.

The festival kicked off with music by Florida Seminole songwriter Rita Youngman, who sang songs telling the lore of her tribe.

Keeping the wildflower hunters entertained during musical interludes, Florida folklorist Car-

ol Mahler told stories that showcased the state's rich history.

"Our Wayside Shrine Trail is one of the few venues where the public can readily encounter this rare and extraordinary shrub," said Mollie Doctrow, MOFAC's curator, who organizes the annual festival. "Early spring is the ideal time for

the pygmy fringe tree to flower, giving the public a singular instance in which to view this beautiful plant."

Miller and her troop rounded a turn on the trail. "Here's a pygmy fringe tree," she said. "Oh, no, it's not flowering yet." Still, the group huddled around the shrub, listening to Miller describe how the trail came to be and what makes the native wildflowers special.

The trail is the brainchild of Doctrow, noted for her award-winning woodcuts of natural habitats. She conceived the trail based on her own exploration of nature. The trail opened in 2011.

Doctrow said the public can glimpse a range of native plants flowering along the trail: the big flag pawpaw, sky-blue lupine, and another endangered species, the scrub St. Johns Wort.

For more information on the Wayside Shrine Trail, call Doctrow at 863-784-7240 or visit www.waysideshrinetrail.com.

Certify as a forklift operator through SFSC

AVON PARK —

Government safety watchdogs call them powered industrial trucks. But to workers in warehouses, factories, and the neighborhood improvement stores, they're just forklifts.

Now South Florida State College offers a two-part class leading to certification as a forklift operator, meeting the demand from the federal government that all employers hire only trained operators.

The first session starts Tuesday, April 5, 5:30-8:30 p.m., in Building I, room 211, on SFSC's Highlands Campus, Avon Park. This classroom session will cover the basics of safe forklift operations.

The second session is scheduled for Saturday, April 9, with training times to be determined during the first session. Students will get hands-on training in safe forklift operations. The Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration requires all businesses using forklifts to certify that operators successfully completed certification training.

SFSC's two-part class meets OSHA standards by providing students with the operational knowledge as well as the skills required to operate a forklift safely. The class costs \$199, and students must be older than 18 years of age. Students need not have a valid driver's license to enroll in the class.

For more information, call 863-784-7405 or email corporatetraining@southflorida.edu.

Visit www.southflorida.edu for more information.

SFSC Briefs

SFSC students, staff battle in College Week

AVON PARK — South Florida State College kicked off its 30th Annual College Week on March 7, at SFSC's Highlands Campus, Avon Park. College Week celebrates the 28 colleges of the Florida College System.

The four-day event pitted teams of SFSC students and employees against each other in a slew of fun-oriented but competitive games.

The first day saw 10 teams vying for top honors in three-legged races and egg tosses. Each team chose off-beat monikers and sported vibrantly colored T-shirts to stand out during the games. From the peach-colored Goonies to the turquoise of There She Is to the bright green of CK Fly, each team tried to best the other while having fun.

On the second day, the teams squared off in Panther Gym for bragging rights as the top dodgeball team. After eight teams were eliminated, SFSC



employees, playing under the team name Risky Business, faced off against There She Is, a team comprised of men's baseball players. Their pitching skills couldn't save them—There She Is went down in defeat at the hands of the college employees.

The sun shone brilliantly on the third day when the teams took to the pool for a belly flop contest.

James Holle, a freshman from Olympia, didn't win the competition but he won the laughs of everyone for painting a bull's-eye target on his belly. In spite of his efforts, he

missed the mark.

From water to land, the teams took to the sand for a contest of strength in a game of tug of war. The men of There She Is held out, defeating Your Future



COURTESY PHOTO

SFSC students compete in a three-legged race and tug-o-war as part of College Week festivities.

Boss, a team comprised of students in SFSC's bachelor's degree in business program.

The games ended with teams running an obstacle course on the college's

intramural fields.

In the end, Goonies tied with There She Is, with each team garnering 95 points.

A tie-breaker chose the winner: There She Is.

Blackbird Anthem to host CD release party Saturday

By **KIM LEATHERMAN**
CORRESPONDENT

SEBRING — Blackbird Anthem will host a CD release party Saturday from 6-8 p.m. at Bufalucca restaurant at 7429 U.S. 27 south in Sebring.

The Avon Park-based band is celebrating the release of its independent debut album, "Stories I've Never Told." The alternative country CD includes four songs, "Liar," "Rum," "Drinking with Me" and "Come Kiss Me."

The songs are country with some southern rock highlights, according to lead singer and songwriter Adam Martin. The songs are arranged in a way that follows the cycle of a relationship, he said. "We write songs that tell stories," said



Courtesy graphic

The cover of Blackbird Anthem's debut CD.

Martin. "I want to write music that speaks to the soul."

The band members will be on hand for a meet and greet. They will be signing CDs and playing a short acoustic set. CDs will be sold for \$5.

Blackbird Anthem will also be playing a full lineup at Dock 633 in Lake



Blackbird Anthem will host a CD release party Friday.

Placid from 8-11 p.m. Friday, March 25.

The band can be found on Facebook, Reverbnation, Amazon, Google, Spotify and soon on iTunes. Check out the website for tour dates and links to digital music at www.blackbirdanthem.com.

Pioneer Day pays tribute to DeSoto's trailblazers



PHOTOS BY BOB BALMANN

Claire Miller— who also portrayed Arcadia Albritton Coker in a moon-time skit — shows youngsters how to sew as part of the children's area demonstration of quilting. For more photos from Pioneer Day, see page 12.

NEW PROGRAM FIRED UP

SFSC holds Fire Science Program dedication



BY MARC VALERO

Highlands Today

AVON PARK — The crowd watched as flames erupted from a car, and then a flashover blaze struck a kitchen, but with the release of a button the fires were out during a demonstration at South Florida State College.

The fire simulators are part of the college's new Fire Science Technology Program, which soon will be graduating its first class that includes nine students who have already found employment.

About 60 attended the Fire Science facilities dedication Wednesday afternoon, including college administrators, government officials and fire department representatives.

State Sen. Denise Grimsley said the investment in the fire science program has far-reaching returns for the community.

"When students succeed, the community does, too," she said. "It's a great day for South Florida State College and Florida's Heartland."

SFSC Dean of Applied Sciences and Technologies Kevin Brown recognized Grimsley's support and efforts to acquire state funding for the department.

PROGRAM, Page 9



KILE BREWER/STAFF

TOP: A demonstration of a flashover was held Wednesday at South Florida State College's dedication ceremony for its new Fire Science Program facilities. **ABOVE:** A crowd gathers outside the 44-foot house fire simulation tower. **LEFT:** A simulated car burn is demonstrated at the dedication ceremony.

The 2014-15 budget allocation for development of the fire science program was \$2.6 million.

Building P was renovated as a fire science training facility, and a 44-foot high, four-story fire tower was constructed at a cost of about \$280,000 for residential and commercial firefighting training. Two used fire trucks, one for \$6,000 and another for \$30,000, were purchased from nearby fire departments.

EMS and Fire Science Program Chair Steve Ashworth said the program started with 15 students, including seven females.

Now the program has 11 students who will be taking the state exam next week. Nine have already found employment, he noted.

College Board of Trustees member Timothy Backer, who served as fire chief of the Arcadia and DeSoto volunteer fire departments for 24 years, spoke at the dedication and later viewed the fire simulator demonstrations with the other attendees.

"It is state-of-the-art stuff," he said. "And, they have all kinds of safety features. It is designed to make sure everybody goes home tonight."

With Ashworth at her side, Grimsley pressed a button that ignited a blaze under one prop, a metal carriage simulating a car that sent flames leaping upward, enveloping it completely in fire.

The college offers a two-year program to earn an associate in science degree in Fire Science Technology and two Fire Science Occupational Certificate programs — Fire Fighter I and Fire Fighter II.

Fire Fighter I certification, which consists of 206 contact hours, is for students who need formal training to become volunteer firefighters.

Fire Fighter II certification, which consists of 192 contact hours, is for students who want to become professional firefighters.

In November, the state fire marshal gave SFSC's program its approval, placing it on Florida's list of approved firefighter recruit training centers. SFSC joins 15 of Florida's state colleges offering the state-approved training.

Ashworth said applicants to the program must have a high school diploma and be at least 18. While applicants need not pass a physical agility test, the nine months of training to complete both Firefighter I and II requires recruits to pull heavy hoses, break through doors and carry a potential victim to safety.

Before SFSC started its program, area residents had to travel to Bradenton, Tampa or Winter Haven to enroll in the complete state-approved course.



TOP: A crowd observes a rappelling demonstration Wednesday at South Florida State College's dedication ceremony for its new Fire Science Program facilities. **ABOVE:** South Florida State College Dean of Applied Sciences and Technologies Kevin Brown introduces Sen. Denise Grimsley at the school's dedication ceremony for its new Fire Science Program facilities. **LEFT:** Adjunct Professor of EMS/Fire Brett Hogan runs the kitchen fire simulator at the dedication ceremony.

'A CATALYST FOR CHANGE'

County's long history of firefighter training hits apex with SFSC school

By **PHIL ATTINGER**

STAFF WRITER

SEBRING — Brad Batz, Sebring fire chief, says a fire department is an insurance policy that no one hopes to use.

Firefighters focus first on prevention through educating the public and fire code inspections. If a fire erupts, they protect life first, then property. They also serve as first responders on thousands of medical calls a year.

"When I started (March

FIRE | 3



Courtesy photo

Firefighter trainees deal with a flameover— hot gases on the ceiling igniting and moving the fire across the room — only this one is under control. It's part of the new fire sciences training facility at South Florida State College. The training has come a long way since the 1931 Florida Fire College that was held in Sebring (left photo). Allen C. Altvater Sr., who was instrumental in forming the local fire department and helped start the fire college in Florida, kept this negative, which in turn was preserved by his grandson, Allen C. Altvater III.

FIRE

FROM PAGE 1

1990) they had just started running medical calls to increase our level of service," Batz said.

The Sebring Fire Department is now at an Insurance Services Office rating of 2, one of only 76 departments in the nation at that level. He attributes that to good equipment and even better training.

Batz was one of a few dozen people at Wednesday's dedication of the fire science program's new training building at South Florida State College, complete with a high-rise tower, smoke generator, flame generators, hydrants and two fire trucks: a 1984 GMC and a 2003 Pierce Contender.

Batz is one of the instructors, which is fitting. The Sebring Fire Department was instrumental in getting the Florida Fire College started 85 years ago. Then fire chief Allen C. Altvater Sr. worked with the state firefighters association and other partners to set up the school in Daytona in 1930, Batz said. First, they had two pilot classes in Sebring and built a wood tower and a small house on the corners of Mango Street and Lemon Avenue as training platforms.

Back then, the classes lasted three days; now, they're four months, Batz said.

Tim Eures, Highlands County Emergency Operations Director, said such an in-county facility "has been needed for a long time." It will save from having to send people to Polk or Manatee counties for training — 206 hours for Firefighter 1 (volunteers) and 192 additional hours for Firefighter 2 (paid).

"As budgets reduce travel (allowances), we'll have this right in our back yard," Eures said. "It will be a catalyst for change."

Batz said the original fire college transformed Sebring and other small departments from collectives of business owners agreeing to put out each other's fires to today's highly professional, full-service units.

"When nobody else will do it, fire service will do it," Batz said.

Out of 2,974 calls in 2015, Sebring Fire

answered 2,572 medical calls, and the rest were vehicle wrecks (extractions, first aid and clean up), fires (structure, trash and brush), public assistance, hazardous materials, rescues and bomb scares.

To keep up, training never stops, Batz said. His firefighters don't just sit around the station when not on a call. They train — every day, and on days off — on plans to attack fire in local buildings, to do public education or to do hydrant, truck, gear or equipment maintenance.

They also have to know how to best extract people from hybrid or electric cars with 40,000-volt cables, or from cars with airbags set to pop from everywhere.

The newest training now is meth labs, he said, which are toxic and explosive.

"Everybody expects the fire department to know what to do," Batz said.

Some days, they're slammed, but a good day is a slow day, he said, because that means someone else isn't having a very bad day.

While a firefighter — paid or volunteer — is always on call, Batz said his crews spend one-third of their time at the station away from family. When they return home, they're trying to recuperate for the next shift.

"They gotta rest," Batz said. "When the bells go off, we don't have a choice. They call, we go."

Nearly \$100K grant will help SFSC scholars focus on cultures of Heartland region

BY TONY JUDNICH

Highlands Today

tional Endowment for the Humanities for a three-year humanities initiative. The money will pay for a project titled "A Sense of Home: From Cultural Conflict to Coexistence in Florida's Heartland."

The project will bring into the school's humanities curricula the study of the cultures of the Heartland region, from the history of its indigenous peoples and European adventurers to recent influxes from the Caribbean, the Americas,



FILE PHOTO

South Florida State College has been awarded a \$99,619 grant for a three-year humanities initiative.

GRANT, Page 5

Grant

From Page 1

Asia and Africa, according to information from the endowment.

Pressler, who wrote the grant application with Lindsay Lynch, SFSC's director of grants development and federal relations, will lead the "Sense of Home" project.

"I've always had this interest in Florida history, and I'm delighted that we got the grant," Pressler said. "It's a little different from the usual sort of grant. We are devoting it to intensive faculty development both on the college and high school level. It will be used for our faculty and high school teachers to get acquainted with experts on Florida history."

During the project,

small-scale seminars will be held for college and high school faculty, and "I hope our people (at SFSC) will give public lectures, as well," Pressler said. "This is a real opportunity for our faculty and for high school teachers and the community."

The college's grant is one of five grants, totaling \$413,519, that the National Endowment for the Humanities awarded to institutions of higher learning in the Sunshine State. The grant to SFSC was the second-largest of the five, behind only a \$205,000 grant awarded to the University of Florida for cataloguing Franciscan missions of La Florida.

The grants are part of the latest round of funding by the National Endowment for the Humanities, which is an independent federal agency. It award-

ed a total of \$21 million in grants for 248 humanities projects in 44 states and the District of Columbia, according to information from endowment spokeswoman Paula Wasley.

The grants "bring the humanities to life for Americans by helping preserve valuable cultural resources, advancing research and supporting films and exhibitions that communicate the lessons of history and culture to new audiences," endowment Chairman William D. Adams said in a statement.

Highlands County residents and visitors who are interested in the indigenous people of this region can learn more about them by checking out permanent archaeological displays at the SFSC Mu-

seum of Florida Arts and Culture in Avon Park. The displays include bone and stone artifacts from the so-called Belle Glade people, who long ago inhabited an area near Lake Placid known as the Blueberry site.

This site "has furnished evidence of continuing habitation for hundreds of years," and artifacts found there "provide strong evidence for a vigorous and ongoing trade relationship with tribes as far away as the Mississippi and Ohio rivers," according to the museum website.

The museum currently is open from 12:30-4:30 p.m. on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays.

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On stage at South Florida State



Carpenters Remembered

AVON PARK — Karen and Richard Carpenter sold over 100 million records and still hold the record for the most consecutive top 10 singles. Michelle Berthing Brett takes center stage at 7 p.m. Saturday, March 5 at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts with her seven-piece band of top-notch Nashville musicians to create a musical enchantment. Tickets start at \$27. Visit performances.southflorida.edu or call 863-784-7178.



3 guys, 30 instruments

AVON PARK — Three guys. Thirty instruments. And yes, they play all 30. Highly popular entertainers because of their comic skits, audience participation and their musical inventiveness, New Odyssey wows audiences by their unbelievable musicality. They will be on stage at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts at 1:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 8. Tickets start at \$13. Visit performances.southflorida.edu or call 863-784-7178.



Broadway's Next Hit Musical

AVON PARK — Broadway's Next Hit Musical is the world's only unscripted theatrical awards show. It will be at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts at 7 p.m. Wednesday, March 9. Master improvisers gather made up, hit song suggestions from the audience. The audience votes for their favorite song and watches as the cast turns it into a full blown improvised musical. Tickets start at \$20. Visit performances.southflorida.edu or call 863-784-7178.

Singer Jack Jones to perform at the Wildstein Center

He is the voice of the 'Love Boat Theme' and 'Wives and Lovers'

BY MARC VALERO
Highlands Today

AVON PARK — Grammy winning singer Jack Jones will present his acclaimed vocal style 7 p.m. March 22

at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts at South Florida State College.

Jones earned two Grammys for "Best Pop Male Vocal Performance" with his

singles "Lollipops and Roses" by Anthony Velona and the Bert Bacharach/Hal David tune "Wives and Lovers."

As the rock 'n roll era entered its second decade in the 1960s, Jones bucked the rock trend, displaying his cool charm and vocal talents bringing to mind clas-

sic popular singers such as Mel Torme, Tony Bennett and Frank Sinatra.

In the 1970s, he continued to record and put his trademark sound on many of the current standards, when he got a call from famed composer Paul Wil-

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COURTESY PHOTO

Jack Jones is a two-time Grammy winner who will be performing at South Florida State College.

Jones

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Williams asking him to sing the theme to a new television show.

Speaking to Highlands Today by phone from his Palm Springs, California, home, Jones said he told Williams he would record the theme. But, Williams cautioned him that he didn't know anybody who wanted to watch a show about a cruise ship.

As it turned out, starting in 1977, "The Love Boat" sailed for a lengthy 10-year cruise on network television, with Jones singing the opening theme to a disco beat.

Jones noted that he wrote an episode of the show that featured himself and his dad.

Looking back at what prompted him to be a performer, Jones said that while attending University High School in West Los Angeles, a classmate, Nancy Sinatra, told him not to miss a school assembly because her father would be performing. After seeing Frank Sinatra perform, Jack said he knew that is what he wanted to do.

In 1957, his father, actor/singer Allan Jones, was headlining at the Thunderbird Hotel in Las Vegas. Jones said his dad invited him to perform with him and see how he liked it.

Jones recorded a few singles on Capitol Records and an album — with little response.

He continued to work day jobs and was working as a gas station attendant when his first album was released on Kapp Records. He heard one of his songs on the radio while

he was washing a customer's windshield.

"Lollipops and Roses," was getting good radio play in Boston, Jones said.

"They said if you shortened this thing down, you got a hit; so we did and it became a hit and got a Grammy," he said.

Jones said the lyrics to his other Grammy winner "Wives and Lovers," which encouraged housewives to dress up for their husband's return from the office, caught a little flak from women's groups.

"I laugh about it all the time and there was a time when it really wasn't funny," he said. "It was a serious issue, and the National Organization of Women were really pounding their fists about it."

It was an innocent song of its time and he agrees with the objections to the lyrics, Jones said. The issues with it didn't last long, however.

South Florida State College Director of Cultural Programs Cindy Garren said Jones' recent United Kingdom tour was a hit as he performed in support of his new album "Simply Sinatra."

"Jack still has the chops and it will be a memorable concert," she said.

Tickets for the show are: \$59, \$51 and \$46. Groups of 12 or more can save 25 percent.

Those who purchase VIP seats (first two rows, \$65) will receive an autographed Simply Sinatra CD and will have a private meet and greet with Jones after the show.

For more information, go to: www.performances.southflorida.edu.

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Panthers stay busy on the diamond

Panther 5K spearheads big Saturday with baseball, softball teams at home

BY ALLEN MOODY
Highlands Today

The South Florida State College Panthers ended their two-game losing streak in style on Monday, defeating IMG Academy 8-2.

The Panthers now stand at 13-8 overall with conference play beginning next week.

"We have played some up and

down kind of baseball here the last few weeks," said Panthers coach Rick Hitt. "We really need to continue to work on the consistency that is required to have season-long success.

"Concentrating on the process daily and not the outcome is something we need to continue to work on. I like our club and the effort level. Our mental toughness is being challenged at times and we have to respond in a better way."

The weekend got off to an auspicious start for South Florida State College, as Miami Dade College scored five runs in the top of the first inning in Friday's 11-7 Sharks' victory. The Pan-

thers tried to rally, trimming the Miami-Dade lead to 7-4 after five innings, but the Sharks scored three runs in the top of the seventh to open the lead back up.

Harrison McClure homered for the Panthers and Tobias Culpepper drove in a pair of runs. Dalton Scarborough had two of the team's nine hits, but South Florida didn't help its cause by committing three errors and issuing six walks.

The Panthers traveled to New Port Richey on Saturday and ran into a tough customer on the mound in Pasco-Hernando pitcher Jason Fluke, who

PANTHERS, Page 2



HIGHLANDS TODAY FILE PHOTO

South Florida State College's Dalton Scarborough slides safely into third in the Panthers sweep of Ave Maria University earlier this season. South Florida is at home on Friday and Saturday.



HIGHLANDS TODAY FILE PHOTO

The inaugural SFCC Panther 5K Run/Walk attracted a great turnout in 2010. The seventh annual event, a fundraiser for the SFCC athletic programs, is scheduled for Saturday.

Panthers

From Page 1

improved to 3-0 on the season with a four-hit complete game in the Conquistadors' 4-2 victory.

Fluke fanned 10 batters in the game.

Cody Spencer doubled and tripled for the Panthers and Matt Portis had a hit and scored one of the two Panthers' runs. The game was tied at 2, but the Conquistadors scored single runs in the sixth and the seventh to secure the win.

On Monday, the Panthers broke open a close game with four runs in the seventh inning. Portis and Evan Shaffner both knocked in a pair of runs. Cody Spencer had two hits with an RBI and John Tatum was 2 for 3 and scored a pair of runs.

"We are 21 games into the season already and we have seen a bunch good things, but we have to keep working each day to get better," Hitt said. "I am looking forward to the next 34 games with these guys."

The Panthers will be home Friday when they host South-

eastern College. It will be Special STARS night at the ball park.

The Panthers softball team wasn't quite as busy as their counterparts, splitting a doubleheader against Miami Dade College on Saturday. The Panthers dropped a tough 4-3 contest in the opener, but stormed back with an 11-3 victory in the nightcap.

In the opener, Samantha Vance was 3 for 3 for the Panthers and scored a run, while Cristina Colli was 2 for 4 with a run scored and an RBI.

In the nightcap, the Panthers broke the game open in the second inning with seven runs on their way to the five-inning mercy rule victory. Amanda Ross was 2 for 3 and knocked in four runs, while Stephanie Norris drove in three runs. Katlyn Vega scored three runs, while Colli and Vance were both 2 for 3 with a pair of runs scored.

The Panthers (13-10) visit Broward College in Plantation on Thursday.

Saturday is shaping up as a big day for the Panthers, as things will kick off with the seventh annual Panther 5K

Run/Walk at 8 a.m. Registration is \$25 for adults; \$20 for students; and \$15 for children ages 6 to 12. Children under 6 may participate in the race at no cost, providing a registration form is completed on their behalf. Well-behaved pets are also welcome. Online registration is available at www.southflorida.edu/giving/panther-5K.

Awards are presented to the first male and female who finish the race; to the top three male and female participants in each age category; and to the top male and female finalists in the masters and grand masters divisions.

Both the baseball and softball teams will also be at home later in the day, as the Panthers' softball team hosts Lincoln Land Community College in a doubleheader starting at 2 p.m. and the baseball team hosts Pasco-Hernando Community College beginning at 4 p.m.

For more information on the SFSC Panther 5K Run/Walk, call the SFSC Foundation at 453-3133.

South Florida State College



JIM TAYLOR

South Florida State College's Evan Schaffner slides safely into second base in Saturday's 8-6 loss to Pasco-Hernando State College.

Panthers go 2-1 on baseball diamond

Softball team on roll, improves to 17-10 for season

BY JIM TAYLOR

Highlands Today Correspondent

AVON PARK — The South Florida State College Panther baseball team squandered a four-run lead, as numerous errors allowed the Pasco-Hernando State College Conquistadors to storm back to defeat the Panthers 8-6 on Saturday at Panther Field.

"We had a really good fifth inning," said South Florida State College coach Rick Hitt. "We put some really good offensive at-bats together, piece by piece. Jonathan Struck pitched well up to that

point, but our relief staff did not finish their innings which was disappointing to see."

After Struck and Conquistadors' starting pitcher, Riley Choate, battled through four scoreless innings to start the game, PHSC scored the first run in the top of the fifth inning.

The Panthers answered back in the bottom half of the inning with five runs to take a 5-1 lead.

Alfred Brown started the inning reach-

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JIM TAYLOR

South Florida State College shortstop Evan Schaffner throws to first during Saturday's game.

Panthers

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ing base on a walk. The Panthers put on the hit-and-run with John Tatum hitting a single in the hole created by the shortstop, who was breaking to second to cover the bag with Brown moving on the pitch.

Brown advance to third on the hit but did not stay there long as Quentin Davis doubled into right-center to drive in both Brown and Tatum and put the Panthers on top 2-1.

A single by Hernando Sierra and a walk to Dalton Scarborough loaded the bases for Equon Smith.

Smith crushed a line drive to the right-centerfield fence that cleared the bases and had him standing on third as the Panthers led 5-1 with no outs.

The Panthers were unable to take advantage of the situation and went into the sixth leading 5-1.

The Conquistadors scored three times in the sixth and once in the seventh to tie the game at 5.

Though the Panthers were able to retake the lead in the bottom of the seventh, 6-5, they lost it in the top of the eighth inning when Pasco-Hernando scored three times to take the lead for good and win the game 8-6.

"We were not sharp" Hitt said. "We were sloppy, pitched in the middle too much and when we did throw a good pitch, we made a defensive mistake."

"It was a combination of things, but the best way to characterize this game was that it was a sloppy game."

Panther starting pitcher, Struck, left the game after pitching five innings. He gave up one run on five hits.

After that, the Panther pitchers gave up 10 hits and the defense committed six errors that contributed to the loss.

The rest of the week was better for the Panthers, who clobbered Southeastern University 11-0 on Friday. The Panthers scored four runs in both the first and second innings on their way to the win.

Scarborough was 3 for 3 and drove in a pair of runs; Smith was 2 for 5 with



JIM TAYLOR

South Florida State College outfielder Alfred Brown fields a hit on Saturday.

two RBIs; Jason Plyn knocked in two runs; Brown was 2 for 4 and scored twice; and Davis and Tatum both scored twice. Juan Terron pitched five scoreless innings to earn the win.

The Panthers opened Suncoast Conference play with an 8-7 victory over State College of Florida on Monday. Evan Shaffner had three hits for the Panthers, while Smith and Davis both had two. Tatum scored three runs and Scarborough and Harrison McClure each drove in a pair of runs in the win.

The Panthers play a non-conference game on Thursday at home against Lincoln Land Community College before going back to conference games at home on Friday and Saturday. On Friday, they host the Manatees to complete the three game series and then host St. Petersburg on Saturday.



The South Florida State College softball team continued with its winning ways, sweeping doubleheaders on Thursday and Saturday to improve to

17-10 for the season.

The Panthers defeated Broward 7-5 and 10-8 on Thursday, despite making five errors in each game. In the 7-5 victory, Nicole Caruso knocked in three runs; Amanda Ross and Cristina Colli both had two hits; Colli scored three times and Allie Lawdan scored twice. Stephanie Norris earned the win, while Hannah Lollis and Ross were strong in relief.

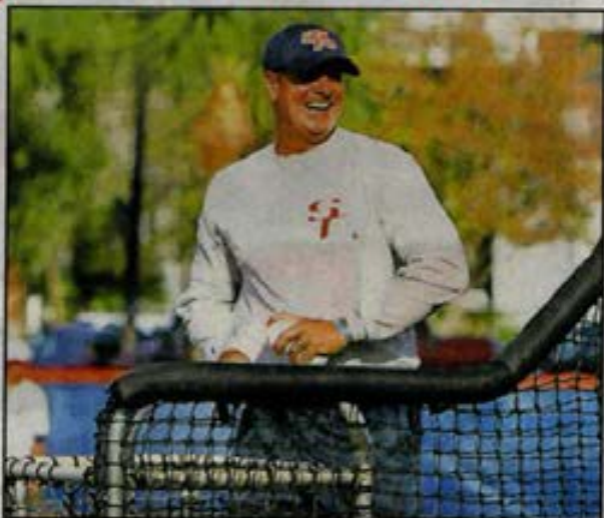
In the nightcap, Cassidy Stawicki was 4 for 4 with a pair of runs scored; Shelby Press, Katlyn Vega, Colli and Carusa each had two hits; and Ross earned the win.

On Saturday, the Panthers swept Lincoln Land Community College, taking the opener 4-0. Haley Pinterich earned the shutout in the pitcher's circle and also had three hits and two RBIs. Ross scored a pair of runs; Samantha Vance had a pair of hits; and Ross scored twice.

The Panthers took the nightcap 7-1 behind the pitching of Evangeline Futch, who allowed just two hits.

The Panthers are on the road until Saturday, when they host Ave Maria in a doubleheader.

COLLEGES: SOUTH FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE



Mary Kay Bernard/News-Sun

South Florida State College baseball coach Rick Hitt shares a laugh with his players and coaches before a home game on Monday night. Hitt last Friday won his 500th game when the Panthers defeated Southeastern University of Lakeland.

Panther coach a big Hitt

The king of SFSC baseball wins 500th game

By **MARY KAY BERNARD**
CORRESPONDENT

AVON PARK — Baseball coach Rick Hitt is well on his way towards leaving a strong legacy at South Florida State College, but he will be the first to tell you that he is not done yet.

Last Friday, Hitt and all the SFSC baseball teams to date, hit an important milestone and won their 500th victory against Southeastern University of Lakeland.

The announcement

MEET RICK

* **Who:** Rick Hitt.

* **What:** South Florida State College baseball coach.

* **Claim to fame:** Last Friday, Hitt won his 500th game when the Panthers beat Southeastern University of Lakeland.

was made at the game by Hitt's wife, Jayma, and he was promptly congratulated with an ice bath by his players.

HITT

FROM PAGE 1

"It was an enjoyable experience," said Hitt. "It just shows that I've been doing it for a while and have had a chance to coach good teams and good players."

The Panther baseball team was launched 17 years ago under Hitt's direction.

Hitt has been coaching for 28 years. Before coming to SFSC, he spent 10 years coaching at Sebring High School, his alma mater, where he was an assistant for the first five years.

He attributes his baseball success first to his dad and then to his many coaches.

"Once I got to the high school level, I was fortunate to play for two good, quality people, coaches Gary Rapp and Brent Ommert," said Hitt. "Those were my high school coaches and they impacted my life as a player."

Hitt went on to play baseball as a pitcher at Santa Fe College for Hall of Fame coach Harry Tholen. He then finished his playing career at St. Thomas University with coach Paul Maimieri, who now is the current LSU coach.

"They continued to impact my life and my choice of this profession," Hitt said.

Hitt, in turn, has had the opportunity to have a positive impact on hundreds of players.

"I'm just as concerned about them becoming good men, husbands, fathers and leaders of their households and those qualities as I am about how many ball games they've won," Hitt said. "Growth is a big part of my discussions with them."

When asked, the players responded with enthusiasm, saying he's a man of his word, knows the game well, is caring, takes an interest in all of his players and is a good mentor.

"He's one of the best coaches I've ever had," said SFSC freshman Matt Portis, a 2015 SHS graduate and former Blue Streak baseball star. "He's really knowledgeable about the game. All in all, he's a great guy to play for."

Hitt never let go of his baseball knowledge.

"When professional baseball didn't work out for me coming out of college, I had a choice to make," said Hitt. "I chose to go into teaching and was fortunate enough to find an opportunity with Highlands County Schools.

"Sebring Coach Jim Howard then gave me my first shot as an assistant coach in the school system at Sebring," Hitt said.

Hitt said he can't think of any other place he'd rather work.

"This is a great place to work and we run a lot of great kids through this program," Hitt said. "I believe this is the most challenging level to coach because the kids can only stay for two years at the junior college level. It's also very

rewarding because kids move on to the next level after one or two years.

"We have a tremendous matriculation rate (80 to 95 percent) of players moving on to four-year schools," Hitt said. "I give a lot of credit to the college professors on campus because as students they need to achieve a certain level of academic standing to be recruitable."

As for any special teams he has coached over the years, Hitt said: "Every team holds a special place for me. But, in the spring of 2000 when I stood and listened to the National Anthem at my first game as a college coach, that was a special highlight for me.

"I'm extremely happy to have a supportive wife, Jayma," Hitt said. "She's been there every step of the way and she's a fabulous person."

Hitt also has two college-age daughters, Sydney and Cassady, who have been very encouraging. And, Hitt has been encouraging to others, as well.

"Coach Hitt is an inspiration to many," said SFSC President Dr. Thomas Leitzel. "He works hard and he challenges his players to do their best on the field and

in the classroom.

"As the college's athletic director, he is relentless in making sure all programs follow the rules," Leitzel said. "He is dedicated to running

a first-class program. We are fortunate to have coach Hitt's skillful talents."

"Baseball is so special because it's so much like life," said Hitt. "There are peaks

and valleys. It's one of those games that can be paralleled with life. You often have to find your way out of the valleys. The game defines who you are character-wise."



Mary Kay Bernard/News-Sun

Spending time on pre-game drills, such as batting practice here before a home game, is one of Rick Hitt's favorite things to do as South Florida State College baseball coach.

Rough going on the diamond

LP, SFSC come up on short end of scoreboard in baseball action

Highlands Today sports staff

LAKE PLACID — The Lake Placid Green Dragons played a solid game most of the night against Class 8A Palmetto on Friday.

But the one inning they didn't was too much to overcome, as the Tigers scored sixth of their seven runs in a game that was delayed due to lightning in the top of the fifth inning, as Palmet-

to win a 7-4 non-district game.

With the game scoreless entering the bottom of the second, the Green Dragons went to work offensively, as Jason Andrews reached one a one-out walk, but was forced out at second on a fielder's choice off the bat of Diego Mireles. DJ Williams singled and Angel Ojeda followed with an RBI single to score Mireles.

Cody Jolley followed with an infield single and Williams kept running on the play and scored. Ojeda also scored when the throw got by the catcher and Jolley advanced to third. An RBI single by Tay Williams made it 4-0 in favor of the Green Drag-

ons after two innings.

Lake Placid pitcher Damian Lusby was able to escape a pair of two-out walks in the top of the third and the Green Dragons started the bottom of the third with a double by Sam Callahan and a single from Mike Warner, but were unable to pad their lead.

Things went downhill for the Green Dragons in the top of the fourth, as four errors helped the Tigers score six runs and grab a 6-4 lead when Mirles came into pitch with two outs and was able to limit the damage.

The Green Dragons got a dou-
DIAMOND, Page 2



ALLEN MOODY/STAFF

Lake Placid's Cody Jolley fields a throw at Sebring, as Sam Callahan backs up the play during Friday's game with Palmetto.

Diamond

From Page 1

ble from Alan Vega, but were unable to capitalize and the Tigers went on to take the win.

The Green Dragons will remain at home during the week, as Lake Placid hosts Hardee in a non-district game on Tuesday, before welcoming county rival Sebring for a game on Thursday. The Green Dragons wrap-up a busy week on Friday with a game against North Port.

The South Florida State College Panthers didn't fare any better, dropping a Sun-coast Conference game to Polk State College on Saturday, as the Eagles scored six



ALLEN MOODY/STAFF

Lake Placid's DJ Williams scores a run in the Green Dragons' game with Palmetto on Friday.

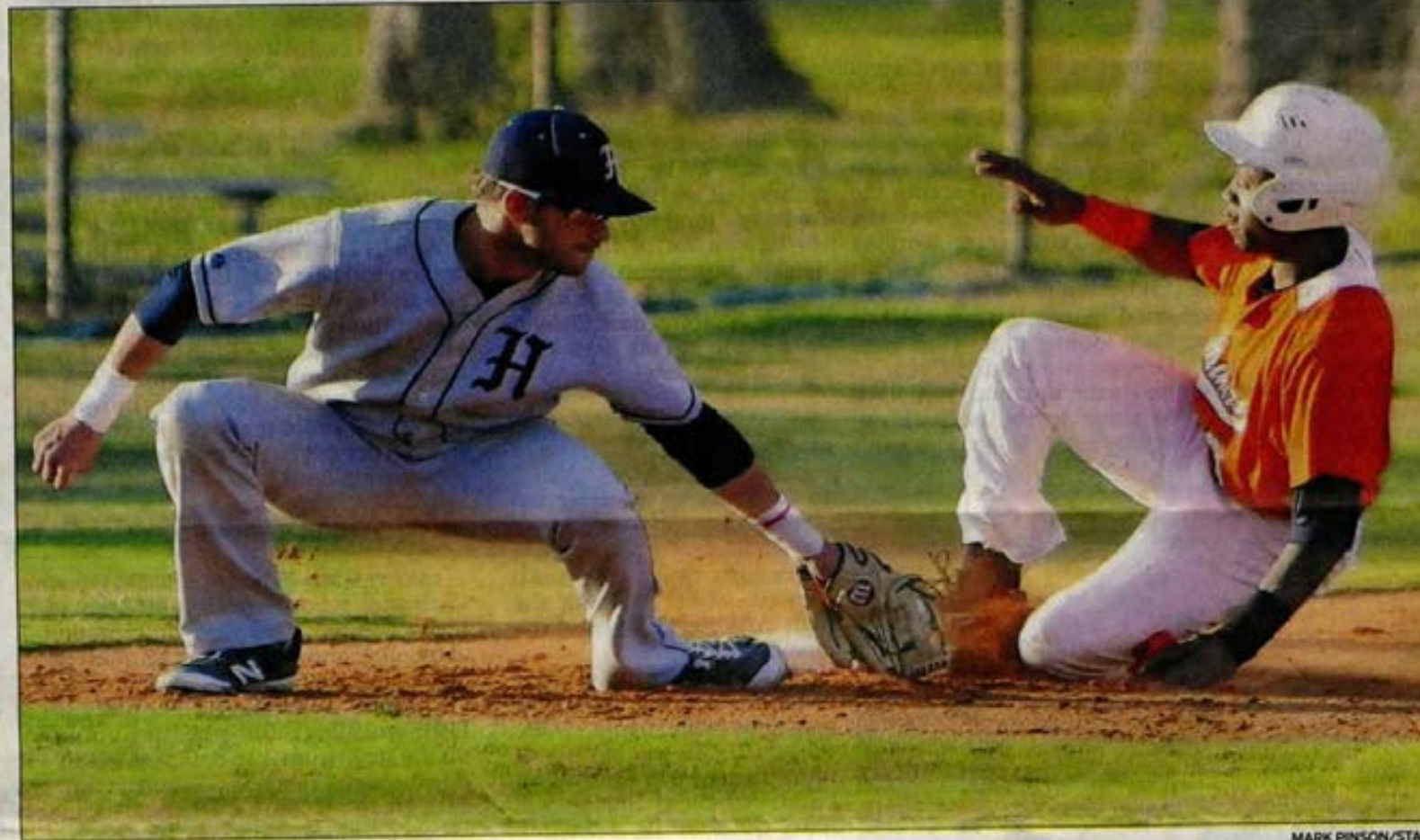
runs in both the first and second innings and cruised to a 13-0 victory, taking two of the three games between the two

teams.

The Panthers begin a three-game series with Florida Southwest State College at

Panther Field tonight at 6. Sebring hosts Lakeland on Tuesday, while Avon Park hosts McKeel Academy.

South Florida State College Baseball



MARK PINSON/STA

South Florida State College's Alfred Brown steals third base during Tuesday's Suncoast Conference win over Hillsborough Community College. The Panthers beat the Hawks by a score of 12-4.

Panthers hammer Hawks

SFSC defeats Hillsborough for conference win

BY MARK PINSON

Highlands Today



MARK PINSON/STAFF

South Florida's Hernando Sierra swipes second base during Tuesday's win over Hillsborough Community College at Panther Field.

AVON PARK — South Florida State College pounded out 18 hits en route to a convincing 12-7 Suncoast Conference win over Hillsborough Community College on Tuesday at Panther Field.

The impressive victory, which gave South Florida a three-game sweep of Hillsborough, improved the Panthers to 22-11 overall and 6-3 in conference play.

"We swung the bats pretty well," said South Florida coach Rick Hitt. "Actually, we swung it well the entire series. It's extremely difficult to sweep a series in our conference, and you have to take your hats off to our guys because they did what was required to get that done."

Hillsborough pushed a run across in the top of the first inning off of South Florida pitcher Jason Plyn to take a 1-0 lead.

South Florida answered in a big way in the bottom of the frame as Alfred Brown, John Tatum, Quentin Davis and Harrison McClure drew walks off of Hawks right-hander Dylan Vilaros to force in a run.

Dalton Sacrborough drew a one-out,

PANTHERS, Page 2

Panthers

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bases-loaded walk to score Tatum, and Hernando Sierra stroked a two-run single to right field to put the Panthers on top by a score of 4-1.

Hillsborough failed to score in the next two innings, while South Florida tacked on a run in the second inning on a run-scoring single by McClure, and the Panthers tallied a run in the third on an RBI single by Evan Schaffner to take a commanding 6-1 lead.

The Hawks broke through in the top of the fourth inning as Brayan Morales belted a two-run homer to make it 6-3.

South Florida increased its lead in the bottom of the inning as Davis singled, advanced to third on a double by McClure and scored on a single to center field by Scarborough to make it 7-3.

Cody Spencer came on in relief in the top of the fifth for the Panthers and gave up a run as the Hawks pulled within 7-4.

The Panthers went back to work with the lumber and scored three runs in the sixth inning and two more in the seventh inning to take a comfortable 12-4 lead.



MARK PINSON/STAFF

South Florida's Harrison McClure scores as Hillsborough Community College catcher Michael Ballestero waits for the throw during Tuesday's game.

Hillsborough bounced back as Morales uncorked a two-run homer to cap a three-run rally in the top of the eighth inning to pull the Hawks closer at 12-7.

South Florida went down in order in the bottom of the inning against Hawks reliever Orsen Josephina.

The Panthers brought in Austin Haworth to close out the game and the

hard-throwing right-hander breezed through the Hillsborough hitters to secure the conference win.

"The guys are working hard and playing hard," Hitt said. "We're doing a lot of good things but we need to keep doing that. Our conference is a dogfight year in and year out and you have to come to the ballpark everyday ready to go. You can't

take any inning or game for granted. We've played 33 games, but we have 27 left, so we have a long way to go and we have a lot of things we need to improve on."

South Florida is back in action with a Suncoast Conference game at Polk State College on Saturday.

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