

Students give Rodger Smith high marks for love of learning

Rodger Smith loves his wife. He loves his three kids. He loves his community. He also loves his job.

"I am now in my third year teaching full time at South Florida State College," said Smith. "I have to say I really, really love this work."

At a time when a record number of Americans report dissatisfaction with their work, Smith's love for his job stands out. He teaches introductory psychology courses at SFSC.

Job satisfaction among Americans topped 60 percent in the late 1980s, according to the Conference Board, a non-profit business research firm that publishes an annual survey of U.S. workers' level of contentment with their jobs.

Last year, only 48.3 percent of Americans said they were satisfied with their jobs. A majority of Americans hasn't been satisfied at work since 2005.

Smith places himself squarely in the camp of those who hold a genuine affection for their jobs. He found himself at SFSC after he landed a part-time teaching position on the Highlands Campus in Avon Park in 2007, a position he did not seek out.

"I was busy with my own consulting business at the time and got a call from a friend to fill in for an SFSC instructor who had to take leave," said Smith, who agreed to step in teaching for a few weeks. "Next, the dean asked me if I might be interested in developing an online psychology course and I said, 'Sure, I can do that.'"

Smith had completed his doctoral degree in adolescent psychology two years earlier, after working for 14 years with teens and adults recovering from substance abuse.

"I had learned that my calling was working with kids, especially those who had drug abuse problems" Smith said from his office in the SFSC University Center. "That's how I got started in psychology and also working with adults," he said.

Like his chancing upon SFSC, Smith didn't set out on a career in addictions treatment — he sort of stumbled into it.

"I am from God's country, South Jersey, a place called Haddon Heights," Smith said. "I moved to Fort Lauderdale in 1992 to spend some time with my brother and took a job at a drug treatment program for adolescents simply because I needed money."



COURTESY PHOTO

"I have to say I really, really love this work," said Dr. Rodger Smith, who is in his third full-time year as an SFSC psychology professor.

It was at Outreach Broward, a residential center for children 8 to 18, that Smith found his calling. At age 25, still single and without a college degree, Smith said he started to learn about mental health and addictions treatment. Even though his choice was made without any forethought, Smith said he took to working with teens in trouble.

He decided to complete his bachelor's degree. He also decided to start a family, marrying his wife Dawn on New Year's Eve in 1996.

"When people get to know my wife, they forget my name," Smith said with a laugh. "She's not my better half, she's more like my better three-quarters."

Soon came their first child, son Aslan, named after the great lion who figures throughout "The Chronicles of Narnia" by C.S. Lewis.

"They were my favorite books growing up, and not just me, but my wife, too," Smith said.

With a family, a college degree, and several years of addictions treatment experience under his belt, Smith set about finding a town better suited to raising children.

As it was by happenstance that Smith came to teach at SFSC, so it was that he found clinical work in Highlands County. "When I got here without a job, I looked for work in adolescent mental health," said Smith. "But, if you look around, you'll notice there isn't any."

Driving down West College Drive, Smith noticed the Florida Addictions Treatment Center. He inquired about employment, and though his background was in adolescent programs, he got hired on as an addictions counselor.

Soon came two more children, girls Rilian and Corin, like their older brother named from characters in Lewis's novels. Smith left full-time counseling for graduate school. He attained state certification as an addictions counselor and mental health professional, and earned his doctorate from Capella University in 2006.

Rather than return to counseling, Smith opted for a stint as consultant to owners of small to medium-sized businesses. Then came the call in 2007 asking if Smith would substitute for the SFSC instructor. After taking up the dean's challenge to launch the online psychology course, Smith also started teaching classroom-based psychology courses.

With the departure of a longtime professor, SFSC offered Smith a full-time teaching position.

"Professor Smith brings a wealth of clinical and academic experience to the classroom," said Kimberly Batty-Herbert, SFSC's dean for arts and science. "His background in addictions treatment and his experience with adults and children, gives him a perspective on psychology that shows in his classroom instruction and the students' satisfaction."

Batty-Herbert said her favorite comment from one of Smith's students was, "I liked that the instructor made us think!"

When hearing that his students give him high marks for his classroom instructional methods and love of learning, Smith flashes an "aw shucks" smile.

"I like them and they like me," Smith said with a grin. "I guess it's a good match."

SFSC class focuses on cyber security

With a world of threats, the relatively new college program is spurring plenty of interest

BY JAY MEISEL

Highlands Today

AVON PARK — These days, it's none too infrequent that stories of massive data breaches are reported.

Then, there are other issues relating to cyber security, such as the government's recent attempts to obtain data off an iPhone previously possessed by terrorists.

For Jeff Stulz, a Highlands County resident, cyber security became an issue closer to home. He said a close friend became the victim of identity theft. That's part of the reason he's interested in enrolling in the cyber security program at South Florida State College.

Brian Bohlman, an instructor at South Florida State College's relatively new program, said the frequent news coverage on cyber security has promoted interest among potential students for the program.

Bohlman said students want to work for either government or private businesses to help secure their computer networks. But it's not possible to totally safe-proof a computer network, he said.

"It's a cat-and-mouse game between the good guys and the bad guys," he said.

The program is about 1½ years old and has about 50 students, who can either complete an abridged version in one year or fully graduate in two. It is offered through the SFSC career college.

Tina Gottus, director of the Xcel-IT Program at SFSC, said there has been a lot of interest

Security

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among government and private businesses in hiring graduates of the program.

Offered are classes relating to computer forensics, network security, security testing and auditing, ethical hacking and digital forensics. Students also do internships. The program deals with security issues, but also getting informa-

tion from cellphones.

Bohlman said students have had internships with South Florida State College's IT department, the Highlands County Clerk of Courts and the Hard-ee County School District. Some students soon will be participating in an internship with the Highlands County Sheriff's Office, which extracts information from cellphones, computers and laptops.

Students learn ethics regarding extracting infor-

mation and other facets of their jobs, he said.

Bohlman said he's also hoping the program increases awareness of the need for security.

"Right now companies don't do anything until after they've been hacked," Bohlman said. At the same time, companies don't necessarily want to spend millions of dollars to beef up security, he said.

One plus involving SFSC's program is that students don't need to be

computer experts to enroll, he said.

Gottus said another plus is that the field has a high demand for students.

Stultz said that is another reason he wants to enter the program. He said he wants to help keep people and their general information safe. "Nobody should have to go through having their security threatened," he said.

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Student gets bike to get to class

Former farmworker aims to get GED, nursing certificate

Special to Highlands Today

AVON PARK — Sharon Jones has a new bike — a pink one.

Now she can pedal her to way to school. No more hitching rides or 30-minute walks under Florida's punishing sun.

Jones is no middle or high schooler. Now a grandmother, Jones is poised to earn her GED and nursing assistant certificate at South Florida State College in a few months. The two-wheeler gives Jones a reliable way to get to classes on SFSC's Highlands Campus.

The purchase of Jones' bicycle came from funds earmarked for SFSC's Farmworker Career Development Program, an initiative that aims to help farmworkers learn the skills needed to compete in today's job market.

"I'll now be able to get to SFSC in less than 15 minutes," said Jones, when she picked up her bicycle last week at the office of her case manager on the college's campus in Avon Park.

Jones moved to Avon Park a year ago from South Carolina, where she picked fruit and vegetables. She heard from parishioners at her church that SFSC had a program to guide farmworkers toward jobs that offer self-sufficiency.

After running Jones through an assessment, SFSC's farmworker program placed her in adult education classes to prepare her for the adult high school equivalency examination. Jones said she plans to start a certified nursing assistant program once she has her diploma in hand.

"Even though Sharon had no means of transportation other than her feet, she had a perfect record of attendance," said Tara Jefferies, the coordinator of SFSC's farmworker program. "Her progress was



COURTESY PHOTO

Sharon Jones sits atop the bicycle that she will pedal to classes at South Florida State College.

so good that we decided to purchase a bicycle for her to ensure she made it through the final months of study, especially now that the heat is turning up."

Colleges in regions with high concentrations of farmworkers participate in the federally funded program.

To enter the program, students must be U.S. citizens, or legal residents, with a work history on farms. While most of the funds go toward tuition, case management, and classroom-based supports, the program can purchase critical items for students — items like bicycles.

Jones said she has pinned her hopes on working in a nursing home. She relishes the chance to settle into a career away from fields.

"Now I can stay on campus studying as long as I want without having to worry about how I'll get home," Jones said.

"Can I take the cardboard off the wheel now?" Jones asked Jefferies.

"Of course," Jefferies said. "It's yours now. Just watch out for the cars!"



Courtesy photo

Public speaking competition

Avon Park High School student Britanya Graham (center) demonstrated excellent communication skills during a recent public speaking competition. Britanya was recognized as the winner of the annual Avon Park Rotary Speech Contest. The local club contest is the first of three levels culminating in a district contest scheduled next month in Lakeland. Each contestant is asked to develop a 5- to 7-minute presentation based on the Rotary International theme. This year's theme is 'Be a Gift to the World.' Britanya competed in the group contest March 30 at the Bert J. Harris Jr. Agricultural Center. District 6890 finals will be held at the Bartow Library on April 18 with a \$1,000 grand prize. Presenting Britanya with a certificate are Avon Park High School teacher Whitney Meeks (right) and Kimberly Batty-Herbert, representing Avon Park Rotary.

SFSC offers business workshops

AVON PARK — South Florida State College's Community Education Department is offering a variety of Foundation Tools for Business Success Workshops.

In **Designing Your Team Playbook**, learn the value of knowledge and skills needed to create an edge in managing a winning team and to provide optimal services to customers and clients. We will examine the critical tool for developing and maintaining a compliant, state-specific Workforce Management Personnel Handbook. The workshop is offered April 22, 12:30 – 2:30 p.m., Building T, Room 20. The cost is \$75, and the course number is (CRN) 21551/BUZ 0161.

In **Tools for Business success and Team Efficiency**, learn two tools for team management and business success. The first is writing job descriptions and understanding the role they play. The second is the importance of developing and maintaining compliant personnel files for your team and business. The workshop is offered Friday, April 29, 12:30 – 2:30 p.m., Building T, Room 20. The cost is \$75, and the course number is (CRN) 21552/BUZ0162.

Register for classes in Building B, at the Highlands Campus in Avon Park or any SFSC campus or center. For information on Community Education classes, call (863) 784-7388 or email CommunityEducation@south-florida.edu.

More sessions in May:

Session 3 is May 6, **Building a Winning Team**.

Session 4 is May 13, **Effective Team Training and Evaluations for Continued Growth**.

Session 5 is May 20, **Discovering your Team's Synergy**.

Session 6 is May 27, **Structuring an Effective Team Communications Culture**.

—Highlands Today



Courtesy photo

Leitzel speaks to LP Rotary

South Florida State College President Dr. Tom Leitzel spoke to the Lake Placid Morning Rotary Club. He talked about he college's cyber security program being taught by Bryan Bohlman that is doing very well in the college. Also he was proud of all the sports programs as all were winning especially baseball, that may get into the playoffs. With over 7,000 students and a great board SFSC is a to- notch learning institution for the future of the heartland. Pictured are (from left) Pete McDevitte, Leitzel and Norm Church.

SFSC working on star-studded entertainment lineup

By KIM LEATHERMAN
CORRESPONDENT

AVON PARK — South Florida State College's Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts has announced a star-studded lineup for the 2016-2017 season. The season will include the Artist Series, Matinee, Trending Now and Jazz series.

According to Cynthia Garren, Director of Cultural Programs, the performing arts center is still in negotiations with the artists and the schedule is subject to change. Tickets will go on sale to the general public in October.

The gifted young pianist, Ethan Bortnick, will kick off the Artist Series on Nov.



Courtesy photo

The South Florida State College Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts is in line to host another superb lineup of entertainers this fall and winter.

19. Celebrity performances scheduled are country music superstars Pam Tillis

and Lorrie Morgan, contemporary Christian band Point of Grace, the Florida

Philharmonic and others.

The legendary Burt Bacharach will wrap up the Artist Series on April 1.

The matinee performances are equally impressive. The lineup includes tributes to Neil Diamond, Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis. Laugh, dance and clap along to Paulie and the Goodfellas, Murder on the Nile and the Flying Horse Big Band, just to name a few.

The Trending Now Series will showcase beautiful music and dancing with shows such as Artrageous, Barrage 8 and the Florida premiere performance of the South Carolina Ballet's Beauty and the Beast. The Jazz Series gets underway on Jan. 18 with Eddie Metz.

Whether you like smooth, New Orleans style or classic jazz, the series has something for everyone.

Concerts by Bria Skonberg, Bill Allred's Classical Jazz Band, New Orleans Nighthawks and the CanAmGer Band will thrill lovers of this genre.

"The Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts is the number one cultural arts attraction in Highlands County," said Garren. "We have very group sales pricing. Groups of 12 or more get 15-40 percent off; plus, the group organizer receives a free ticket."

For a complete schedule and times visit the website at <http://performances.southflorida.edu/>.



SFSC students at Depot Museum

South Florida State College students who are enrolled in the academic Honors Program have the additional advantage to participate in service-learning in the community. Extra credit is given for volunteering within an organization. Pictured are SFSC students Carlos Negrón and Annsley Bohlman, who are part of the Depot Museum's Silver Palm Dining Car's service staff assisting with group luncheon events. The Avon Park Depot Museum is fortunate to be associated with Dr. Charlotte Pressler and the Honors students who have devoted many volunteer hours to the museum.

New SFSC educator finds work, home in U.S.

Special to Highlands Today

Maday Leon's life has been a whirlwind of change.

At 23, when most of her classmates were walking across the stage picking up their teaching diplomas, she stood by crying. She wasn't crossing the stage with her peers.

She had met all the graduation requirements. But she was in Cuba. If she had accepted her diploma, the government would have forbidden her



COURTESY PHOTO

Dr. Maday Leon is SFSC's new lead instructor in elementary education.

to immigrate to the United States.

She chose freedom.

Now, she's three

months into her job as the lead instructor of South Florida State College's Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education (BSEE) program.

"The lack of freedom is what brought me to America," said Leon, who has immersed herself in the routine of coming up to speed meeting the demands of her new job. "My father was a political prisoner of the government, and we had an intense desire to live in a country where we would

be free."

Leon has spent the last three months learning about Highlands County, its public schools and the challenges prospective teachers face when trying to break into a career in teaching.

Leon is no stranger to elementary education. She comes to SFSC after 12 years teaching elementary and middle school students in Lee County. She specialized in teaching reading and English to Speakers of other Lan-

guages (ESOL), a skill increasingly important to teacher education programs, especially in Highlands County.

"I know what it's like to struggle learning English," said Leon, whose speech is accented by the Spanish she grew up speaking. "When I arrived in Miami, it was a nightmare learning English because wherever I went people would speak to me in Spanish."

To get past the hurdles she ran up against, Leon

resorted to an unusual approach. "I got the Yellow Pages and started calling up companies with American-sounding names so that I could speak to people in English," Leon said with amusement.

Determined to build upon the teacher education she had received in Cuba, Leon enrolled in Miami's Barry University, where she specialized in ESOL.

With her bachelor's de-

SFSC

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gree in hand and a family that included a girl and an infant son, Leon set out on the next phase of her life.

"My husband and I weren't happy with the quality of life in Miami," Leon said. "So in 2004 we chose to move to Cape Coral, which we thought would be a better community for our children."

The move to Cape Coral was an education for Leon. "I have to say it was a big culture shock," said Leon. "Unlike Miami, it lacked the diversity of a metropolis, which taught me much about adjustment and helped me understand how new teachers might be better trained."

After teaching elementary school for three years, Leon wanted to burnish her teaching resume. She got a master's degree in education from Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) and began teach-

ing middle school. She sought out an assignment at a school with a student body drawn from neighborhoods grappling with low income and families in distress.

"My heart is really in teaching and helping students learn," said Leon. "I knew these kids could succeed, and I even had my own son attend the same school."

Sensing that she could use her experiences—both as immigrant and an instructor working with children from low-income backgrounds—to train new teachers, Leon returned to FGCU to earn a doctorate in curriculum and instruction.

Leon's graduate research and dissertation focused on educational diversity. Her work on the subject led to the department chairperson asking Leon to teach an introductory course in diversity to students in the university's teacher education program.

"The course was a won-

derful opportunity from me to share my knowledge and experience with new teachers," Leon said. "But not just that, it gave me a chance to share my passion for teaching too."

Only a few months later, Leon saw an announcement. SFSC was searching for a lead instructor in its program to train elementary school teachers.

"I saw the ad for the position and I said 'wow' that's the place for me," said Leon, who is no stranger to the Heartland.

"When my family moved to Cape Coral, we immediately bought a small farm with a few cows in Arcadia, in DeSoto County," Leon recounted from her new office on SFSC's Highlands Campus. "I grew up in a rural area in Cuba, and I've always had a connection with the land."

Leon saw an opportunity to put her teacher-training skills and experiences to work in a program that launched in fall 2014. She is particularly excited

over two features she said makes SFSC's program different from other colleges.

"Our students complete their program with teacher endorsements in ESOL and reading," Leon said. "That's not something you find in other teacher training programs."

Leon said the endorsements are much sought after by school districts looking to hire new teachers. What's more, she said, the Highlands County school district will see a wave of retirements in the next few years. "This is the time for people who have been thinking about a career in teaching to come in and talk to us."

Recruitment is one of Leon's chief responsibilities. She has been working with candidates in order to get them ready to start classes in the fall, when SFSC will enroll its next cohort of students.

Applicants to the elementary education program must have completed their associate degree

or higher. The state also requires applicants to pass a test of general knowledge before they enroll in the program. Leon said she is eager to hear from those who are interested in making a career change.

What does Leon think of Highlands County and its residents?

"So far, I love it," Leon said. "I couldn't be more happy with the move to Highlands and my job at SFSC."

Leon just wrapped up the purchase of a 10-acre tract of land with a house near the Air Force bombing range.

"We can now move our cows right to our new home," Leon said with a beaming smile. "Buying a home is major commitment. I am staying put."



Woman's Club honors sheriff and college

SEBRING — The Woman's Club of Sebring met on Monday at their club house and Jamie Bateman, from the SFSC Foundation, was the guest speaker. The club gave a \$2,000 scholarship donation to the college at that time. It also presented Sheriff Susan Benton with a letter of appreciation signed by all of the club members and congratulated the sheriff's department on keeping Highlands County safe and secure. The club wanted to let our sheriff know that we appreciate and support our sheriff's deputies.

SFSC Briefs

Open house scheduled

AVON PARK — South Florida State College invites prospective students and their parents to an open house from 4:30 to 6 p.m. April 28 in the lobby of Building B on the Highlands Campus, 600 W. College Drive, Avon Park.

Faculty and staff will be available to answer questions and help new students apply for admission. Guided tours of the Highlands Campus will be held at 4:45 p.m. and 5:15 p.m.

"Participants will have the chance to learn about SFSC's programs of study, financial aid and scholarships, advising and counseling, student life, and support services for students," said Summer Miller, SFSC's recruiter. "They can drop in any time during the open house's hours."

"Our open house is attended by all the key college staff, which makes it easy for prospective students to learn about the college and get their questions answered in a single afternoon," Miller said.

SFSC offers a two-year associate degree, and bachelor's degree programs in elementary education, nursing, and business with a concentration in supervision and management. Students who earn an SFSC associate degree are guaranteed admission to an SFSC bachelor's degree programs or one of Florida's 12 state universities, the college said. "In addition, SFSC offers numerous occupational training programs that can be completed in approximately a year or less and lead to employment in specific fields," the college added.

SFSC's Adult Education program also helps residents earn high school equivalency diplomas.

To attend the open house, take Entrance 1 from College Drive and follow the signs to Building B.

"Whether you're pursuing a bachelor's degree, an associate degree, college credit certificate, or occupational certificate, SFSC's open house can help you start your journey towards reaching your educational goals," Miller said.

Another open house will be held June 9.

For information, email Miller at summer.miller@southflorida.edu or call her at 863-784-7447.

Minority males to participate in panel

AVON PARK — On April 29, South Florida State College will play host to nearly 200 male students from the five high schools in DeSoto, Hardee, and Highlands counties.

What's the occasion? SFSC wants to close the gap between minority males who graduate from high school and fail to enroll in college, SFSC said.

SFSC aims to tackle this problem by bringing minority male high school students to the college's Highlands campus to hear from other young men from minority backgrounds who have made a success of the transition to college.

"The high schools students will interact with a panel of current young minority males who attend SFSC," said Timothy Wise, dean for student services. "Then, they will hear from a panel of successful minority SFSC alumni."

Wise, who organized the program with the help of a campus-based task force and the five high schools, said the close-up encoun-

ter will show the high school students they can succeed at SFSC. Wise said the principals will join the students during the event.

While the college enrollment rate of African-American and Hispanic males has increased in the past decade, they still enroll in fewer numbers than their non-minority peers. Also, fewer minority males go on to graduation.

Before treating the students to a lunch of pizza, Zep Augustine, a motivational speaker, will get the students fired up over the prospect of launching their academic life at SFSC. Augustine, who played football for the Lake Placid Green Dragons and University of Florida Gators, now owns his own fitness company, Next Level Sports and Fitness.

Before leaving for home, the students will get the opportunity to meet one-on-one with admissions officers, financial aid advisors, and student support counselors.

"We want these young men to leave the campus knowing how to apply for admission, how to pay for college, and how to find help from caring SFSC employees when their on our campuses," Wise said.

For more information on SFSC's minority male initiative, contact Wise at 863-784-7104 or wiset@southflorida.edu.

SFSC Briefs

'Italian for Travelers' course

AVON PARK — In "Italian for Travelers," learn the alphabet, numbers and basic conversation related to eating, shopping, hotel registration and public transportation.

The course is offered as an eight-week course Mondays and Wednesdays, running May 2 through June 22, 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. The cost is \$90, and the course number (CRN) is 30784. The course requires the purchase of the course book, Rick Steves' Italian Phrase Book and Dictionary, ISBN-13: 978-1612382012.

Register for classes in Building B, at the Highlands Campus or any SFSC campus or center. Registration can also be paid over the phone by calling (863) 784-7405.

Business workshops set

AVON PARK — In "Building a Winning Team," participants explore the success formula of hiring a winning team, and the role it will play in the success of a business.

The workshop is offered May 6, 12:30-2:30 p.m., Building T, Room 20. The cost is \$75, and the course number is (CRN) 30728/BUZ0163.

In "Effective Team Training and Evaluations for Continued Growth," explore the dos and don'ts of team employee evaluations, and how they can positively impact the overall achievements of the company. The workshop is offered May 13, 12:30-2:30 p.m., Building T, Room 20. The cost is \$75, and the course number is (CRN) 30729/BUZ 0164.

In "Discovering Your Team's Synergy," discover ways to tap a "Team's Synergy." The workshop is offered May 20, 12:30-2:30 p.m., Building T, Room 20. The cost is \$75, and the course number is (CRN) 30730/BUZ 0165.

Register in Building B at the Highlands Campus or any SFSC campus or center.

Child care classes on tap

AVON PARK — Florida Child

Care Professional Credential Renewal English is an independent online study course that is self-paced and has no exams or class meeting. The cost is \$164, and the course number (CRN) is 30243.

Director's Credential Renewal English is an independent online study course that is self-paced and has no exams or class meeting. Cost is \$169, and the (CRN) is 30244.

Both courses run May 6 through Aug. 1 and are available in English and Spanish. Also for both courses, students must notify Debbie Gutierrez via email when they register and have paid to gain access.

Program Management is a non-credit independent online study course that is approved by Department of Children and Families for anyone seeking a director's credential. The course runs May 6 through Aug. 1. The cost is \$227, and the course number is (CRN) 30490.

Register in Building B at the Highlands Campus or any SFSC campus or center.

SFSC offers yoga classes

AVON PARK — South Florida State College's, Corporate and Community Education is offering yoga classes at the SFSC Highlands Campus, 600 West College Drive.

In yoga, learn how to reduce stress, improve circulation, calm the emotions, re-align posture, and stimulate weight loss.

This class is offered on Thursdays, April 21 through May 12, 5:30-7 p.m. The cost is \$36, and the course number is (CRN) 21572.

Register for classes in Building B, at the Highlands Campus, Avon Park, or any SFSC campus or center. You can also register and pay over the phone by calling 863-784-7405. For more information on this or any other Community Education classes, please call 863-784-7388 or email communityeducation@southflorida.edu.

SFSC Fire Science school graduates first class



Courtesy photos

The graduates of SFSC's fire science program. From left, Trenton Carlisle, Brianna Blosser, Coleton Choate, George Bailey, Cheryl Bailey, Michael Darrow, Lawrence Dunn, Robin Gilileo, James Schaill, Rachel Smit, and Stephen Wilson



Rachel Smit picking up her diploma from Steve Ashworth, EMS and fire science chair, at SFSC's first firefighter graduation ceremony. Smit is now a firefighter with the Sebring Fire Department.

AVON PARK — Four women and seven men recently made history at South Florida State College. They were members of the first class to graduate from SFSC's fire science program.

The graduates are now eligible to join the ranks of career firefighters serving in county and municipal fire departments, with one already putting in full-time shifts.

Family members of the graduates, SFSC officials, and fire officers from across the state watched the graduates mount the stage in the SFSC University Center Auditorium to collect their diplomas.

"We are so proud of what you have accomplished, and it's fitting to say 'congratulations' to you all," Kevin Brown, dean of applied sciences and technologies, told the graduates.

Brown, one of the college's administrators who led the drive to bring a firefighting training program to SFSC, praised the work the instructors put into moving the inaugural class of recruits through the nine months of training.

"We are also proud to announce that as of today 90 percent of the class have passed their practical examination," Brown said.

The 11 recruits 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.

One of the state's most experienced fire officers was on hand to address the graduates and share what he has learned in his 42 years as a paramedic, firefighter, department chief, and now state fire marshal.

"You can't just stop with having learned the basics of firefighting and life-saving skills," said Julius Halas, the director of the Division of State Fire Marshal. "You need to go on and get your associate degree in fire science, and then move on to

higher degree levels to improve yourself."

Halas recounted how he started his firefighting career after passing the GED. He told the graduates he learned in the field that leadership required higher education.

So, he said, he went back to college for his associate degree, following that up with bachelor's and master's degrees.

"You got to match your life skills with the knowledge you'll get in the classroom," Halas said.

One of those listening to Halas, Rachel Smit, started the program in August. She said she came to the attention of Sebring fire chief Brad Batz, one of the adjunct instructors who taught the recruits.

"Chief Batz saw me applying myself in training and he urged me to sign up with Sebring as an intern," Smit said. "Now I am on full-time and a member of the department."

Smit is the only female firefighter on duty and the third

woman to serve in Sebring's fire department.

Another graduate, Trenton Carlisle, interns with Sebring's department. He plans to move into a full-time position once he completes his emergency medical technician training at SFSC in July.

SFSC's fire science program was a project 10 years in the making. The program went from dream to reality after the Florida Legislature, at the urging of State Senator Denise Grimsley, appropriated \$2.6 million in 2014 for the college to refit existing classroom space, build water and fire towers, and acquire the equipment to open the program on the college's Highlands Campus.

The state requires career firefighters to complete a two-part training program. The initial 206-hour phase, known as Firefighter I, gives recruits the credential needed to serve in a volunteer fire department.

A second 192-hour

course, Firefighter II, teaches recruits the additional skills to work as a career firefighter in a county

or city fire department.

SFSC joins 42 state-approved training centers across the

state in offering the two-part course, including 15 of Florida's state colleges.

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The graduates are now eligible to join the ranks of career firefighters serving in county and municipal fire departments, with one already putting in full-time shifts.

Family members of the graduates, SFSC officials, and fire officers from across the state watched the graduates mount the stage in the SFSC University Center Auditorium to collect their diplomas.

"We are so proud of what you have accomplished, and it's fitting to say 'congratulations' to you all," Kevin Brown, dean of applied sciences and technologies, told the graduates.

Brown, one of the college's administrators who led the drive to bring a firefighting training program to SFSC, praised the work the instructors put into moving the inaugural class of recruits through the nine months of training.

"We are also proud to announce that as of today 90 percent of the class have passed their practical examination," Brown said.

The 11 recruits 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.

One of the state's most experienced fire officers was on hand to address the graduates and share what he has learned in his 42 years as a paramedic, firefighter, department chief, and now state fire marshal.

"You can't just stop with having learned the basics of firefighting and life-saving skills," said Julius Halas, the director of the Division of State Fire Marshal. "You need to go on and get your associate degree in fire science, and then move on to

higher degree levels to improve yourself."

Halas recounted how he started his firefighting career after passing the GED. He told the graduates he learned in the field that leadership required higher education.

So, he said, he went back to college for his associate degree, following that up with bachelor's and master's degrees.

"You got to match your life skills with the knowledge you'll get in the classroom," Halas said.

One of those listening to Halas, Rachel Smit, started the program in August. She said she came to the attention of Sebring fire chief Brad Batz, one of the adjunct instructors who taught the recruits.

"Chief Batz saw me applying myself in training and he urged me to sign up with Sebring as an intern," Smit said. "Now I am on full-time and a member of the department."

Smit is the only female firefighter on duty and the third

woman to serve in Sebring's fire department.

Another graduate, Trenton Carlisle, interns with Sebring's department. He plans to move into a full-time position once he completes his emergency medical technician training at SFSC in July.

SFSC's fire science program was a project 10 years in the making. The program went from dream to reality after the Florida Legislature, at the urging of State Senator Denise Grimsley, appropriated \$2.6 million in 2014 for the college to refit existing classroom space, build water and fire towers, and acquire the equipment to open the program on the college's Highlands Campus.

The state requires career firefighters to complete a two-part training program. The initial 206-hour phase, known as Firefighter I, gives recruits the credential needed to serve in a volunteer fire department.

A second 192-hour

course, Firefighter II, teaches recruits the additional skills to work as a career firefighter in a county

or city fire department.

SFSC joins 42 state-approved training centers across the

state in offering the two-part course, including 15 of Florida's state colleges.

SFSC scholars inducted into Honor Society

AVON PARK — South Florida State College inducted 50 students into its Tau Epsilon chapter of the Phi Theta Kappa honor society in an evening ceremony on April 1.

With families, fellow students, and college administrators looking on, the students recited in unison an oath of membership, joining the honor society that recognizes distinguished academic achievement by students in two-year academic programs.

Dr. Sidney Valentine, SFSC's vice president for academic affairs and student services, served as the guest speaker. In his remarks, Valentine encouraged students to take stock of how far they had come in their still infant academic career.

"Don't assume there is anything you can't do," said Valentine, who recounted that, when he was an undergraduate, he never imagined he would ascend to the

number two post at a four-year college like SFSC.

"Think about the hurdles you have surmounted that brought here tonight," Valentine told the students. "Then you will never sell yourself short when it comes to what you can accomplish."

As the ceremony drew to a close, the inductees stepped to a candlelit table upon which lay the honor society's membership book.

One by one, they affixed their signatures in the book, recording their status as scholars of distinction at SFSC.

Then, with the auditorium lights dimmed, the scholars helped each other light a candle signifying their fellowship in the society.

"By your membership in PTK," Valentine told the students, "You're destined to be the next big thing."

The new Phi Theta Kappa honor society

inductees are: Luc Alfred, Rigenst Alfred, Richard Alvarez, Silvia Alvarez-Vargas, Benjamin Anderson, Teresa Barrs, Marissa Baumann, Brandi Carroll, Tracy Chaney, Rebecca Crews, Adson Delhomme, Janelle Donglasan, Amanda Edwards, Stephanie Escobedo, Elizabeth Etherton, Alexandria Feichtinger, Brisia Fonseca, Melissa Garcia-Rodriguez, Donna Goins, Maria Gutierrez, Hanna Haney, Kimber Harris, Adriana Hernandez, Melissa Hernandez, Megan Hughes, Cara Johnson, Justin Latter, Shanese Leverson,

Courtesy photo

Inductees into SFSC's Phi Theta Kappa honor society light candles during the evening ceremony.

Juaquina Martinez, Philomena Mcknight, Kristin Miners, Daniel Montelongo, Kelley Morgan, Aundrea Pace, Jacob Pakovich, Matthew Palsgrove, Kelsey Pena, Hannah Pepper, Patricia Quinn, Ana Ramirez, Joshua Roe, Krystal Santos, Eric Schulte, Sandra Seetaram, Ansley Selander, Stephanie Smith, Nelida Torres, Brian Ward, Abigail Wiggins, and Summer Xiong.



SFSC students dress for successful job interviews

By **KIM LEATHERMAN**
CORRESPONDENT

AVON PARK — The Dress for Success program transformed students' attire from grunge to professional during the inaugural fashion show on Thursday afternoon. The fashion show was designed to attire the students to attend job interviews dressed professionally.

Students initially modeled their unprofessional looks as Arthur C. Stifel IV announced their future plans. The clothing they wore did not reflect the future positions they wished to fill. Some of the outfits were outrageous enough to elicit laughs from the audience.

Ripped jeans and T-shirts, backless and barely-there ensembles were a no-no for job

interviews, according to Dean of Arts and Sciences Kimberly Batty-Herbert. Flip-flops, makeup fit for a stage and strong perfumes were also advised against.

Batty-Herbert stated that first impressions are very important to a prospective employer.

"The first 30 seconds are the most important," she said. "The employer has already made up their minds as to whether or not you are right for the position. You only get one chance to make a great impression."

A panel of professional local business women critiqued both the inappropriate and professional looks. They offered advice on making an outfit stronger and suggested that closed-toe shoes be worn by both men and women.

Judges were Batty-Herbert, Sheila



Kim Leatherman/
Highlands Sun

Pedro Sanchez models a pair of ripped jeans and T-shirt to illustrate what not to wear to a job interview.



Robert Brown is looking dapper in a dark suit with a pop of color with his green tie.



Megan Smith almost arrived at an interview with a comic T-shirt and jeans but the Dress for Success team stopped her.



Angel Mancillas is dressed for success in a fashion show by the same name.

SFSC

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Richards, Trudy Benton and Connie Olsen. It is noteworthy to mention that the women all work for companies that have donated clothing to the Dress for Success program.

The judges voted Pedro Sanchez as the Top Model 2016.

Students from the cosmetology program did the hair and makeup for the models in the show. Many of them were also models.

"This gives the students real world experience in hair and makeup and haircutting," said cosmetology program manager Tim Johnson. "The whole class participated in one way or another."

Dress for Success attires students with professional clothing donated by members of the community to wear on job interviews. Students are able to keep the clothing they select.

"Students make an appointment to try on



Rachel Burton modeled this dark grey conservative dress to interview in during the Dress for Success fashion show at SFSC.

clothing," said Career Center specialist Pam Jessiman. "It helps the students out that do not have the money for clothing to feel confident on an interview. I am really blessed because I get to see their faces when they get the clothing on."

Jessiman noted that the program works with the public as well. Those who cannot afford clothing for an interview



Right: Pedro Sanchez strutted in this grey suit paired with a pink shirt, suspenders and even a pocket square. He is ready for Wall Street.

can shop at the Dress for Success boutique.

The Leadership Highlands Class of 2012 began the program and it has grown steadily. Donations keep the boutique stocked. Items that are needed are men's suits, sport coats, ladies' dresses, blouses, skirts blazers, dress shirts, ties, medical scrubs, shoes, briefcases and accessories. All items should be gently used, cleaned and pressed.

Call 863-784-7410 for an appointment to drop off donations.



In subdued tones, Sharon Jones will make sure the interviewer pays attention to her face and not her clothes.



Kim Strickland showed off an appropriate interview outfit with neutral tones and a touch of color.



Archaeologist Steve Koski discusses Snake Island site

SPECIAL TO THE
HIGHLANDS SUN

AVON PARK —

Archaeologist Steve Koski will discuss "Snake Island, a Story of Time, Place, Context, and Change" for the Kissimmee Valley Archaeological and Historical Conservancy (KVAHC) speaker series today (Thursday).

The talk will be at 7 p.m. in Building G, Room 101, at South Florida State College's Highlands Campus. The public is invited at no cost.

Snake Island is a story involving coastal habitation, discovery, long-term observations, research and interpretation, sea

level rise, erosion, loss of significant cultural resources, stabilization and protection of the site.

The Snake Island site was discovered in 1994, eroding from the shore of the spoil island at the mouth of the Venice Inlet in Sarasota County. This island on the Intercoastal Waterway produced ceramics, shell tools, and an abundance of sea turtle bones and other faunal materials from a surface shell deposit and sandy beach slope in exceptional preservation.

Background research indicated that the island was once connected to the mainland. A low tidal marsh was cut from the

mainland in 1907, during the initial dredging of the Intercoastal Waterway and used as a spoil site for dredged materials. Beneath the marsh, mud-covered with spoil lay a coastal shell midden dating from the late Manasota/Weeden Island and into the Safety Harbor Period, c. A.D. 600-1500. The site was apparently inundated by the rising sea level.

In 2000, a Phase I archaeological study was conducted as part of the Sarasota Bay Restoration Project funded by the Army Corps of Engineers. In 2013 and 2014 the West Coast Inland Navigation District funded

a stabilization project to protect the eroding site. Studies resulting from these projects gave further insight into the site's occupation and utilization.

Koski is an archaeologist specializing in underwater prehistoric sites. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in anthropology/archaeology from the University of Massachusetts, Boston, and completed graduate studies and a Master of Arts degree program at Arizona State University. His research interests include the prehistory of Florida, coastal adaptations and settlement and subsistence strategies through time.



Courtesy photo

Archaeologist Steve Koski will discuss "Snake Island, a Story of Time, Place, Context, and Change" today (Thursday) at South Florida State College.

Koski has worked as an underwater archaeologist at Warm Mineral Springs in North Port, and worked for two cultural resource management firms, ACI and New South Associates. He has worked as project archaeologist on the Sarasota Bay restoration progress project for new South Associates

of Stone Mountain, Ga., and has served as project archaeologist during the Snake Island Stabilization Project.

He is currently the part-time interim Sarasota County archaeologist and continues to serve as part-time site management at Little Salt Springs for the University of Miami.

SFSC commencement student speaker graduates with inaugural BSN class



COURTESY PHOTO

Sharmin Jones will be receiving her Bachelor of Science in Nursing diploma at South Florida State College's spring commencement on May 5.

Ever since she was a little girl, South Florida State College student Sharmin Jones has been passionate about caring for people.

Now, after 15 years of caring for patients as a nurse, Jones is poised to walk across the stage at SFSC to pick up her Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) diploma at the college's spring commencement on May 5.

"I grew up under the influence of my grandmother, who often minded me after school," Jones said. "I learned a great deal about love and support from a woman who spent her entire life caring for others."

While her grandmother could barely read or write, she helped her husband raise Jones' mother by caring for elderly residents. Without an education, she could not hope to care for people as a nurse.

Not so for Jones.

"When I graduated from Sebring High School, I enrolled in SFSC the following fall," Jones said. "I aspired to a career in nursing, and I realized the only path to that goal ran through SFSC."

When Jones graduates next month, she won't need to look for a nursing position. She's been employed as a registered nurse since 2003.

That fact, coupled with the singular challenge Jones overcame to earn her degree, got her tapped to deliver the commencement speech on graduation night.

After Jones finished high school, she started taking general education classes at SFSC to build an academic record that would get her into the college's 11-month Practical Nursing program.

"Competition for a spot in the practical nursing program was intense, and I didn't get in the first or second time I applied," Jones said. "I wouldn't give up, so I kept applying for a seat in the class and finally earned ac-

ceptance."

Practical nursing, often seen as a gateway to higher levels of practice, involves caring for patients under the direction of a registered nurse or physician.

Jones credited the program's rigorous academic work and the steady supervision of Mary Ann Fritz, the longtime nursing education director who retired in 2008, with learning sound nursing skills and how to adapt to a real-world work setting.

Just as Jones entered the final months of her studies, the grandmother to whom she looked for inspiration, was struck down by cancer.

"I helped care for my grandmother in home hospice, holding her in my arms as she took her last breath," Jones said. "That moment validated for me the decision I made to choose nursing as my career path."

With her licensed practical nursing (LPN) credential in hand, Jones landed a job at

Highlands Regional Medical Center in Sebring. She opted for a shift on the medical-surgical ward. A choice not without a reason.

"I wasn't going to stop at practical nursing; I had my sights set on earning my registered nursing licensure," Jones said. "To gain acceptance into SFSC's registered nursing program, I had to have a sufficient number of work hours in medical-surgical nursing."

Jones gained acceptance into SFSC's Transition LPN to RN Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) program on her first try.

"Going to another school was out of the question for me," Jones said. "Not just because I'd have to move, but I knew from my previous studies that SFSC's faculty exemplified the compassion and empathy that makes nursing what it is—a caring profession."

Jones completed the associate degree transition program in

2003 and earned her registered nurse license. Her RN credential opened a door to advancement in the field.

Jones started a 12-year span of work with an area skilled nursing facility. She worked her way up the ladder of promotions: weekend supervisor, unit manager and finally director of nursing.

When Jones heard SFSC would launch a bachelor's degree in nursing in 2014, she knew a pivotal moment had arrived.

"There was no question in my mind I would apply for SFSC's BSN program," Jones said. "Having a bachelor's degree meant I could progress further along a career path in nursing."

Not only do nurses benefit from higher levels of nursing education, patients do as well. A spate of peer-reviewed research has shown nurses with four-year degrees make fewer medical errors, a boon for patient safety.

"Hospitals also benefit from employing nurses with higher education levels," said Dr. Michele Heston, who taught Jones as she has moved through three nursing education programs at SFSC. "Nurses with more advanced education will incorporate evidence-based best practice into the care they give patients, driving down medical errors."

After Jones learned SFSC had accepted her into its inaugural BSN class, she sought out her employer with the good news. That's when excitement turned to despair.

"My employer told me that I would have to give up my position if I returned to school," Jones said. "After 12 years of dedicated service to my patients, my heart was broken."

Jones said her employer explained they couldn't share her with SFSC's new program—they wanted someone who could be on call at any moment, and classroom time would clash with that requirement. They offered to keep Jones on in a position with less responsibility and a \$20,000 pay cut.

"I knew I was going to SFSC for my degree," said Jones with eyes wide open, recounting the moment when she regained her composure after hearing the bad news. "I went home and told my husband, James, who nearly lost it when he heard about the pay cut."

Jones remembers the moment well. "James looked at me and said, 'You're going to SFSC, even if he had to get a second job.'"

With an air of stoic resolve, Jones had her own take on how to look at the turn of events.

"They can take your job away from you, but not your degree, so I chose the degree," she said.

Jones said her commitment to education will form the theme of her speech to her fellow students and their families, an education that kept her grandmother from becoming a nurse.

"I want to talk about the importance education should play in everyone's life," Jones said. "Work and life are hard enough without that degree or certification."

Paying it forward with gratitude

Former student recognizes impact of SFSC faculty members on his life and career



KAREN CLOGSTON/STAFF

From left: Max Gooding, Mary Wolfe, Mollie Doctrow and Cathy Futral. Wolfe, Doctrow and Futral each received a gratitude award from Gooding at the student art show on Thursday at South Florida State College.

BY KAREN CLOGSTON
Highlands Today

AVON PARK — Among the awards given out at the 2016 South Florida State College Juried Student Art Exhibition on Thursday, April 21 were three gratitude awards presented to three esteemed and long-time faculty members of the college.

Mollie Doctrow, Cathy Futral and Mary Wolfe each received the Max Gooding Award of Gratitude. Gooding, a 2009 alumnus of SFSC, created the award as a way to thank each of the women for the impact they had on his personal life and education and for the legacy of excellence they leave behind at the school.

These awards were the "slightest" attempt at repaying them for what I feel they gave me," Gooding said.

Gooding is a graduate of the college's art program and he continued his education at the University of Florida, graduating in 2013. He now owns and operates a design firm in Naples that specializes in landscape design, graphic design and illustration. Gooding began donating money to the college for purchase awards in 2013; this year he gave \$1,000 for the school to purchase student art-

work from the show.

Gooding chose to bestow the awards on the women at the student art show this year after learning that each would be retiring at the end of the spring term.

On Doctrow's and Futral's impact at SFSC, Gooding noted it "has been monumental." Gooding said that it is up to the students to get what they want out of college as there is no hand holding. And for those who wanted a "richness" of education, he felt that Doctrow and Futral "had boundless information and knowledge to impart."

"I wanted to suck up as much as I could of that information and that knowledge," he said. "They imparted a lot and the college will not be the same without them."

Gooding credits Wolfe, who has worked in the college's Internet technology department for almost 20 years and whom he has known for 11 years, for helping him through a difficult time in his life. He was friends with her daughter at Lake Placid High School, and she recognized his life struggles and offered him help, he said.

Her support has had a lasting impact on him, and he personally thanked her

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SFSC

From Page 7

when giving her the gratitude award on Thursday.

"She exemplifies what selflessness is," he said.

Gooding also said students at SFSC would benefit from getting to know faculty, like Wolfe, who are not necessarily professors because they can offer a wealth of information and add to the complete picture that makes up the college experience.

Wolfe said she was surprised when she received the award. "It was definitely an early Mother's Day present from one of the sweetest boys I have had the privilege to know," she said. "I am so proud of him."

Doctrow, who is the curator of the Museum of Florida Art and Culture at SFSC and teaches graphic design, has been with the college since 2004. She plans to officially retire at

the end of June.

"It's hard to express how important the relationship has been with a number of the students that we worked closely with and Max was one of them," Doctrow said. "We are somebody along the way for so many student who we never see again."

Regarding the former students she stays in touch with, like Gooding, and seeing the success they achieve in life after college, she feels, "Wow, we did something together."

Doctrow acknowledged it was gratifying "knowing that we really made some difference."

Futral has been an art professor at the college since May 1996 and she plans to retire after graduation next month, making her tenure at the school 20 years. She said she was overwhelmed by Gooding's presentation and felt humbled by it.

"Everyone has a story to tell and it is sweet when you are given credit," she said. "Max came to us with all

of his talent and we can't take credit for him," noting that she just helped guide him.

She credits Gooding's ability to give back to the college through the purchase awards. The money he gave this year was distributed among 15-20 students, she said. Futral said she was humbled to be able to give the awards to all of these student because of the generosity of people like Gooding.

"He has inspired my students. He returns each year to make personal contacts with them," Futral said. "He is a mentor and an inspiration and he cares about what the students are doing.

"I am overwhelmed by what he has given back," she said.

The student art show will run through April 28 at MOFAC, which is located at 600 W. College Drive next to the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts.

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SFSC students, instructors recognized on Awards Day

AVON PARK — South Florida State College students were honored for academic excellence and community service during the college's recent annual Awards Day ceremony. Each year, faculty honor students who exhibit talent and exemplary qualities that go beyond academic standards, the college said.

SFSC student Maria Zamora was honored with the Joseph E. Johnston/Bette L. McDearman Student Services Award for exceptional academic achievement, and outstanding involvement in professional, social, and cultural activities and programs.

Cate Cover, SFSC biology instructor, who nominated Zamora for the award, said: "She is a pleasure to work with. She is richly deserving of this award and recognition."

Students presented 2015-16 Outstanding Instructor Awards to Stacy Sharp, arts and sciences, full time; Kimberly Batty-Herbert, arts and sciences, full time; Adam Martin, applied sciences, full time; and Rebecca Schumacher, applied sciences, full time.

Students who received special honors for participation in the following academic programs are: Makayla Chancy, General Business Studies; Harrison McClure, Introduction to Leadership; Stephen Wynn, Principles of Management; Carlynn Harris, Principles of Marketing; Alexis Drzewucki, Drawing I; Victoria Roman, Figure Drawing; Marissa Simpson, Figure Drawing; Taylor Nicole Webb, Painting; Ian Mack, Pottery II; Garrett Edenfield, Brain Bowl Team; Christian Pena, Brain Bowl Team; George Perez Gomez,

Brain Bowl Team; Ashleigh Prieto, Brain Bowl Team; Christian Reitnauer, Brain Bowl Team; Jose Sanchez, Brain Bowl Team; Summer Xiong, Brain Bowl Team; Daniela Ferra-Hernandez, Medical Billing and Insurance; Alexis Armstead, Freshman English I; Michael Oftedahl, Anatomy and Physiology I; Santos Aguilar, Anatomy and Physiology II; Hunter Altman, Anatomy and Physiology II; Miranda Corbin, Anatomy and Physiology II; Alyssa McEwen, Anatomy and Physiology II; Katherine Perez, Anatomy and Physiology II; Miranda Corbin, Microbiology; Alyssa McEwen, Microbiology; Katherine Perez, Microbiology; Amy Heffner, Human Anatomy and Physiology II; Michael Oftedahl, Human Anatomy and Physiology II; Jully Beck, Microbiology; Dulce Hernandez, General Chemistry; Robert Ward, General Chemistry; Lindsay Moon, Organic Chemistry; Christian Manresa, Abnormal Psychology; Candice Rosenbaum, Abnormal Psychology; Megan Darr, Human Development; Lauren Dutcher, Human Development; Tatiana Sullivan, Human Development; Brandon Rosenbaum, Introduction to Psychology; Jamicia Gilmore, General Sociology; Mishel Mandujano, General Sociology; Julie Swift, General Sociology; Alexis Drzewucki, Honors General Sociology; Christian Reitnauer, Honors General Sociology; Stephen Wynn, Organizational Behavior; Lindsay Moon, General Biology II

Carmen Lybarger, Freshman English I; Fachon Binns, Freshman English I; Rosaro Marin, Freshman English I; Francesca Pemble, Freshman English I; Steven Sanchez, Freshman English I; Julie Swift, Freshman English I; Megan Custode, Freshman English I; Richard Alvarez, Freshman English II; Eliary Cabrera, Freshman English II; Thomas Cook, Freshman English II; Sharmin Jones, Freshman English II; Israel Ayala-Rivera, Freshman English II; Mary Patterson, Descriptive Astronomy; Lacey Watson, Descriptive Astronomy; Joy Derrick, General Physics I and II; Carlos Negron, General Physics I and II; Brandon Bowyer, General Physics with Calculus I and II; William Sager, General Business with Calculus I and II; Makayla Chancey, American Literature; Mathew Estima, 2016 All-Florida Academic Team; Roxanne Guerndt, 2016 All-Florida Academic Team; Celina Nuevo, 2016 All-Florida Academic Team; Christian Reitnauer, 2016 All-Florida Academic Team; Erica Roberts, 2016 All-Florida Academic Team; Shaquanya Allen, Business English and Keyboarding; Aaron Lakus, Fundamentals of Speech Communication; Cesar Orduna, Fundamentals of Speech Communication; Kevin Webb, Medical Assisting; Richard Flores, Financial Accounting II; Donna Wall-Vanatta, Financial Accounting II; Jason Plyn, Managerial Accounting; Leighton Skipper, Introduction to Computer Graphics

Shayne Fassler, Differential Equations; William Sagar, Differential Equations; Stephen Jackson, Computer Programming; Joshua Roe, Computer Science; Graphic and Introduction to Microcomputers; Guillermo Aguilar, Food Production Management; Rebekah Tyson, Introduction to Supply Chain; Audrey May, Fundamentals of Speech Communication; Sharmin Jones, Fundamentals of Speech Communication; Daniel Witt, Bachelors of Science in Elementary Education; Alyssa Pauley, Bachelors of Science in Elementary Education; Christian Pena, Biology I

Honors Program

Hannah Cribbs, Undergraduate Research Presentation
Florida Collegiate Honors
Nicole Darder, Undergraduate Research Presentation
Florida Collegiate Honors
Alexis Drzewucki, Undergraduate Research Presentation
Florida Collegiate Honors
Mathew Estima, Undergraduate Research Presentation
Florida Collegiate Honors
Ricky Jefferies, Undergraduate Research Presentation
Florida Collegiate Honors
Carlos Negron, Undergraduate Research Presentation
Florida Collegiate Honors
Luis Ortegon, Undergraduate Research Presentation
Florida Collegiate Honors
Heather Oyola, Undergraduate Research Presentation
Florida Collegiate Honors
Katherine Oyola, Undergraduate Research Presentation
Florida Collegiate Honors
Christian Reitnauer, Undergraduate Research Presentation
Florida Collegiate Honors
William Sager, Undergraduate Research Presentation
Florida Collegiate Honors
Tyler Whalen, Undergraduate

Research Presentation
Florida Collegiate Honors
Dylan Whiteman, Undergraduate Research Presentation
Florida Collegiate Honors
Alexis Drzewucki, Introduction to Astro Biology Honors Seminar Fall 2015
Carlos Negron, Introduction to Astro Biology Honors Seminar Fall 2015
Christian Reitnauer, Introduction to Astro Biology Honors Seminar Fall 2015
Christian Reitnauer, Florida Collegiate Honors Conference Spring 2016, Astronaut Farmers: Growing Food in Space
Dylan Whiteman, Florida Collegiate Honors Conference Spring 2016, Faking Gravity
Alexis Drzewucki, Florida Collegiate Honors Conference Spring 2016, The Science Behind Science Fiction
Heather Oyola, Florida Collegiate Honors Conference Spring 2016, The Science Behind Science Fiction
Katherine Oyola, Florida Collegiate Honors Conference Spring 2016, The Science Behind Science Fiction
Annsley Pohlman, SFSC Honors Program, Spring 2016
Hannah Cribbs, SFSC Honors Program, Spring 2016
Alexis Drzewucki, SFSC Honors Program, Spring 2016
Nicole Darder, SFSC Honors Program, Spring 2016
Mathew Estima, SFSC Honors Program, Spring 2016
Katie LaDue, SFSC Honors Program, Spring 2016
Carlos Negron, SFSC Honors Program, Spring 2016
Heather Oyola, SFSC Honors Program, Spring 2016
Katherine Oyola, SFSC Honors Program, Spring 2016
James Pinkney, SFSC Honors Program, Spring 2016
Christian Reitnauer, SFSC Honors Program, Spring 2016
William Sager, SFSC Honors Program, Spring 2016
Tyler Whalen, SFSC Honors Program, Spring 2016
Dylan Whiteman, SFSC Honors Program, Spring 2016
Rachel Wolf, SFSC Honors Program, Spring 2016

Phi Theta Kappa

Ashley Acosta, PTK Enhanced Membership
Hanna Belcher, PTK Enhanced Membership
Nicole Darder, PTK Enhanced Membership
Christopher Davies, PTK Enhanced Membership
Alexis Drzewucki, PTK Enhanced Membership
Treson Francis, PTK Enhanced Membership
Maribel Garza, PTK Enhanced Membership
Donnie Mullins, PTK Enhanced Membership
Melisa Mullins, PTK Enhanced Membership
Araceli Navaro, PTK Enhanced Membership
Selina Olguin, PTK Enhanced Membership
Selena Olmos, PTK Enhanced Membership
Heather Oyola, PTK Enhanced Membership
Katherine Oyola, PTK Enhanced Membership
Francis Perez, PTK Enhanced Membership
Christian Reitnauer, Enhanced Membership
Victoria Sawicki, PTK Enhanced Membership
Mary Stacy, PTK Enhanced Membership

Student Government Officers

Baylee Gunter, SGA Historian
Rebecca McKenzie, SGA President
Emily Swenson, SGA Public Relations
Ferdinand Cortez-Rios, SGA Secretary
Maxwell Boling, SGA Treasurer
Hernando Sierra, SGA Vice President External Operations
Samantha Vance, SGA Vice President Internal Operations

New corrections officers ready for assignments

AVON PARK — New doors opened for the nine cadets in South Florida State College's Basic Corrections Class 16-189 as they accepted occupational certificates during a graduation ceremony held Wednesday evening in the SFSC University Center Auditorium, Highlands Campus.

Eddie Aguilar, David Breau Jr., Alfredo Flores, Rebecca Hall, Catessa Holt, Jamila Richards, Bobby Ridley, Juan Thigpen and Megan White completed 420 hours of correctional officer training since Feb. 1, according to Michael Austin, coordinator, SFSC Criminal Justice Academy. They took 11 exams in as many weeks, while mastering skills in

first aid, self-defense, and firearms and maintaining a class grade point average (GPA) of 92.5.

Thigpen received a special award for serving as class leader. Ridley received the award for top firearms score — a notable accomplishment. Austin pointed out, considering that he had never handled a weapon before entering SFSC's basic corrections training course. White received the award for the top academic score, earning 454 points out of a potential 482.

In the keynote address, Wauchula police Officer Jesse Poole recalled that, even as a child, his heart was set on a career in law enforcement, and he al-

ways pursued that path. Having a purpose and goals inspired him and kept him on track. "You only get one life to live," Poole told the new graduates. "Locate the path you were meant to walk, and you will find goals along the way."

By the time of graduation, seven of the new correctional officers were already employed in correctional positions.

For more information about SFSC's Basic Corrections Officer course and other law enforcement training programs, call the Criminal Justice Academy at 453-6661, 494-7500, 773-2252, or 465-5300 or visit www.southflorida.edu.



COURTESY PHOTO

Graduates of SFSC's Basic Corrections Class 16-189 are, front row, from left: Jamila Richards, Catessa Holt, Juan Thigpen, Megan White, and Bobby Ridley. In the back row are, from left: Alfredo Flores, Rebecca Hall, David Breau Jr., and Eddie Aguilar.

MOFAC recognizes SFSC students for award-winning art show entries

Special to Highlands Today

AVON PARK — South Florida State College's Museum of Florida Art and Culture honored the winners of its "Steam Powered Innovation" juried student art exhibition during a reception on April 21.

The awards ceremony recognized drawings, paintings, sculpture, and a range of other artwork students created during their studies in SFSC's Art Department. The students' art is on display in MOFAC's gallery through April 28.

"This exhibition is a wonderful opportunity for our students to show their art in a professional museum and to receive recognition for their fine work," said Mollie Doctrow, the museum's curator.

Missy Simpson walked away with the Max Gooding Best in Show Purchase Award for her pencil drawing titled "Kail." She received \$200 for the imaginary rendering of a zebra-like animal with horns in mid-gallop.

Simpson said the students came up with the show's title, "Steam Powered Innovation," to capture the theme of advancements in technology as seen through a Victori-



COURTESY PHOTO

From left: SFSC's Mollie Doctrow, Taylor Webb, Leighton Skipper, Missy Simpson, A. Juarez and Cathy Futral.

an-era viewpoint.

Max Gooding, an alumnus of SFSC's art department, provided \$1,000 for 17 awards to students. Gooding, who went on to earn a degree in landscape architecture at the University of Florida, owns a landscape architecture consultancy, the Max Gooding Co., in Naples.

Leighton Skipper won the Max Gooding Purchase Award of Excellence for his watercolor titled "Me Again."

The Max Gooding Award of Excellence went to A. Juarez for her color pencil drawing, "My Children."

Four students received the Max Gooding Purchase Award, a monetary award

used to purchase exceptional student art pieces for the SFSC Student Art Collection. The winners were Taylor Webb for her acrylic painting "Toucan"; Alexis Drzewucki for her illustration titled "Forward Movement"; Dylan Whiteman for his graphic design "Self-portrait"; and Andres Armengol rounded out the winners with his poster "Jacaranda."

Max Gooding Awards of Merit were presented to E. Georgeanne Paris, photography; Janelle Donglasan and Whitney Williams, pottery; Angelise Reyes, 2-D design; Liz Carroll, acrylic painting; Molly Haney, drawing; A. Juarez and Jose Lopez, graphic design; and

Taylor Webb, sculpture.

Cathy Futral, art professor, presented Outstanding Student Achievement Awards to Missy Simpson and Victoria "Tory" Roman, figure drawing; Leighton Skipper, computer graphics; Alexis Drzewucki, drawing; and Ian Mack, pottery.

Members of the Tanglewood Art League were on hand to present their fifth annual scholarship award to A. Juarez for her outstanding range of drawings. Norma Evans, president of the group of retirees with a passion for art, presented Juarez with a \$300 check. "We look forward to getting to know you better as you move forward with your art education," Evans said.

Max Gooding stood by as Doctrow and Futral presented the awards. "I owe a great deal of my success to three amazing women at SFSC," said Gooding, who presented Doctrow and Futral with plaques and expressed his appreciation for their dedication to teaching. He gave a third plaque to SFSC employee Mary Wolfe, who served as a mother figure to Gooding when he encountered hurdles on way to earning his Associate in Arts degree at SFSC.

A \$50 SFSC Art Alumni Award went to four students: Missy Simpson, Leighton Skipper, A. Juarez, and Taylor Webb.

This year five students

were chosen to receive the MOFAC Docent Award, a \$50 award that recognizes outstanding service to the SFSC, its Art Department and MOFAC. The awards went to Leighton Skipper, Missy Simpson, Liz Carroll, A. Juarez, and Ann Louise Abbott.

SFSC's art students developed the title of the show, promotional graphics, assisted with matting and framing the artwork, and helped install the pieces, Doctrow said.

The 2016 Student Art Exhibit sponsors are Joe and Suzanne Wright, Charles and Anne Reynolds, and the SFSC Foundation.

The show was juried by Joey Sacco, a local artist, former SFSC adjunct art instructor and a member of MOFAC's Advisory Committee.

The exhibition will be on view at SFSC MOFAC through Thursday. The museum is open to the public from 12:30-4:30 p.m. on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, or by appointment for group tours. Patrons of the Wildstein Center may visit the museum one hour prior to matinee and evening performances. For more information, call Doctrow at (863) 784-7240.

5 SFSC students named to All-Florida Academic Team

Students from all over state are honored during a luncheon in Tampa

Special to Highlands Today

AVON PARK — The Florida College System (FCS) has named five South Florida State College students to the 2016 All-Florida Academic Team.

Each year, the Florida College System names an All-Florida Academic Team to honor the most outstanding students for their academic achievement, leadership, and service to the community.

The five students were recognized at an awards ceremony April 21 in Tampa. The SFSC students were Mathew Estima, Roxanne Guernadt, Celina Nuevo, Christian Reitnauer and Erica Roberts. They joined 122 of their peers from 26 colleges of the state's 28-member FCS in being named to the academic team.

"I am proud of these students for their academic achievements that led to being named to the All-Florida Academic Team," said Florida Commissioner of Education Pam Stewart. "Florida colleges are known throughout the nation for their educational excellence, and I am pleased they have prepared these students for success now and in the future."

The students were presented with a medallion recognizing their achievements at a luncheon. SFSC President Thomas C. Leitzel, and Kimberly Hemler, the college's Honors Program adviser, were on hand.

Students named to the All-Florida Academic Team were drawn from SFSC's Honors Program and the college's Tau Epsilon chapter of Phi Theta Kappa, an international academic honor society.

In nominating students for the team, colleges consider participation in academic honors programs, membership in and awards from collegiate societies, and academic enrichment gained from internships and special projects.

Recently, Gov. Rick Scott proclaimed April as Florida College System Month. The 2016 All-Florida Academic Team is sponsored by the Florida Lottery.

"We are proud of the outstanding achievement of our Honors Program and Phi Theta Kappa members and glad to see them honored in this way," said Hemler, whose main role at SFSC is adviser to students at the Advising and Counseling Center on the Highlands Campus.

For more information about SFSC's Honors Program, contact Charlotte Pressler, director, SFSC Honors Program, and professor, English and humanities, at (863) 784-7247 or Hemler at (863) 784-7331.



COURTESY PHOTO

From left: Kimberly Hemler, Christian Reitnauer, and Erica Roberts after the All-Florida Academic Team awards ceremony.

SFSC professor earns Fulbright-Hays scholar award



Courtesy photo

Dr. Sonji Nicholas (second from left) with two of her sociology students before class.

AVON PARK — Dr. Sonji Nicholas, sociology instructor at South Florida State College, has received word that she has been selected for a Fulbright-Hays Seminar Abroad. She will join 15 scholars this summer for a one-month stay in Senegal, a country of 13 million people nestled at the westernmost point in Africa.

"Senegal enjoys a special position among African nations," Nicholas said. "The country has not seen the discord and violence that has surfaced in other states across Africa."

Nicholas said she and her colleagues will use their time in Senegal to examine what's particular to Senegalese society and culture that correlates with the harmony found among its diverse population.

"Three ethnic groups compose the bulk of Senegalese society," Nicholas said. "The Mandinka, Wolof, and Fulani all live in relative peace that contributes to a stable society."

"Senegal not only boasts a varied ethnic population, but a range of religions cut across all ethnic groups," she said. "A large segment of the population is Muslim but Christians and traditional folk religions are practiced by all ethnic groups."

Nicholas submitted an extensive application to the U.S. Department of Education last year, laying out a plan of study and what she expects to incorporate into the classroom curriculum after her stay in Senegal.

"An important part of this seminar abroad is what the scholars bring back to their home campuses and community," Nicholas said.

The Fulbright-Hays

Seminars Abroad program provides opportunities for overseas experience for educators with responsibilities for curriculum development in the humanities, languages, and area studies. Topics and host countries of the seminars vary from year to year.

Nicholas will teach an Honors course on marriage and family at SFSC in the fall that will revolve around much of what she learns while in Senegal.

This summer's trip to West Africa won't be a first for Nicholas. She and a group of similar-minded academics traveled to Senegal in the late 1980s to explore subjects they had studied as a group while undergraduates.

"I remember the Senegalese people as friendly and warm," Nicholas said. "Senegal was a colony of France, and its capital, Dakar, is still known as the Paris of Africa."

She will meet up with her colleagues in Boston

for a week of preparation. They fly from there to Dakar, where they will work from the West African Research Center.

"The Fulbright-Hays Scholar Award is prestigious in the academic community," said Michele DeVane, the chair of the Social and Behavioral Science Department at SFSC, Nicholas' home department. "Only 16 professors throughout the nation were chosen for this award. This is quite an honor for Dr. Nicholas and SFSC."

Nicholas completed her undergraduate work at Howard University in Washington, D.C. She went on to earn a master's degree in African studies at the State University of New York at Albany. She was awarded her doctorate degree in sociology from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Her areas of expertise center on the sociology of the family, race, ethnicity, and social

stratification.

The results of Nicholas' studies in Africa won't be confined to SFSC's classrooms. One of the

requirements of the award entails sharing what's learned with the wider community.

"I'll definitely give some

public talks for the residents of our service area," she said. "I'll publish on what I discover in Senegal, too."

SFSC to launch AgDiscovery summer program June 6

SPECIAL TO HIGHLANDS SUN

South Florida State College will soon launch its AgDiscovery summer program, a weeklong tuition-free class that aims to help high school students explore educational and career opportunities available in STEM fields—science, technology, engineering, agriculture, and mathematics.

SFSC will offer the half-day class at each of its three campuses and the college's Lake Placid Center. The class includes a day-long field trip to the University of Florida in Gainesville, at no cost to the students.

The AgDiscovery summer program will guide students through hands-on agricultural research projects, leadership development tasks, and personal enrichment activities that will bolster students' appreciation of STEM-related subjects.

The first session runs Monday - Thursday, June 6 -9 from 9 a.m. to noon at SFSC's Hardee campus in Bowling Green; and from 1:30-4:30 p.m. at the college's DeSoto campus in Arcadia. The field trip to Gainesville departs each campus at 7 a.m. Friday,

June 10, with students returning at 7 p.m.

The second session runs Monday - Thursday, June 13 -16 from 9 a.m. to noon at SFSC's Highlands campus in Avon Park; and 1:30-4:30 p.m. at the college's Lake Placid Center. The field trip to Gainesville departs the Highlands Campus and the Lake Placid Center at 7 a.m. on Friday, June 17, with students returning at 7 p.m.

Students may register to attend any one-week

session of their choice.

The AgDiscovery summer program is open to students who will enter grades 11 and 12 this fall. Students whose parents do not have a college degree—first generation college students—are encouraged to apply.

Parents should help students apply by Saturday, April 30 to ensure a place is available. The AgDiscovery summer program will accept applications after the deadline

if space is available.

For more information and to register online for the program, visit SFSC's AgDiscovery summer program web page at googl/2QDIY2 or call Leah Sauls at 863-784-7054 or Dr. Grace Danao at 863-784-7230.

SFSC alumnus believes in giving back

AVON PARK — Every college dreams of having alumni like Max Gooding.

Gooding, a graduate of South Florida State College's art department, excelled in the classroom and was involved in student government. After earning his Associate in Arts degree, he went on to a four-year university, graduated, and started his own company.

What's more, he never forgot where he got his start, giving his time, talent, and money to the college that helped propel him to success.

"I wouldn't be who I am without the time I spent at SFSC," Gooding said, while on a recent visit to the Highlands Campus, where he was attending an exhibition to showcase the art of fellow alumni. "Because of what SFSC has done for me, I believe in giving back."

At just 27, the artist and landscape architect finds himself at the helm of his own art and design studio. Still, Gooding finds time to stay engaged with SFSC in spite of the demands of his thriving

business. From sponsoring an award that recognizes promising art students to encouraging young artists on campus to helping SFSC redesign its campus, Gooding is the alumnus who keeps on giving.

A native of southwest Florida, Gooding calls Highlands County home. He graduated Lake Placid High School in 2007, bent on studying art with his own approach.

"I've always loved drawing," said Gooding. "But, I also had an affinity for creating spaces and experiences. Some artists yearn to express themselves in both the second and third dimensions. For me, landscape architecture is how I express myself in three dimensions."

Gooding enrolled in SFSC immediately after high school. "I knew at the time that I wasn't in the best frame of mind when I left high school, so going away to a university would not have been a good option for me," he said.

He doesn't shy away from acknowledging that he had his share of



Courtesy photo

Max Gooding talking to a visitor at SFSC's Museum of Florida Art and Culture alumni art exhibit.

problems that come with adolescence, bad friends and bad habits.

"At SFSC, I wasn't just a number as most students are at a large university," Gooding said. "A couple of SFSC faculty and staff members were instrumental in helping me rid those problems from my life."

With his life in order, Gooding poured himself into his studies. He credits art instructors Cathy Futral and Mollie Doctrow with his success. "Cathy and Mollie recognized my drive early on," he said. "They had a subtle, supportive way of pushing me to my limits."

Gooding delights in

recounting that he had an aversion to painting in water colors. He said Futral coaxed him into sticking with the medium under her tutelage. It worked. "She completely flipped my perspective with her style of teaching," Gooding said. "Now water color is my preferred medium."

"Max was an outstanding art student. Every now and then a student, as Max did, reminds me of the story of Leonardo's teacher who taught his student to paint and, in the end, the student outdid the teacher," said Cathy Futral, who taught Gooding painting.

"Another aspect of Max that is equally important to anyone who knows him is his generosity and caring nature," said Futral. "Four years ago, Max established the Max Gooding Award as a way of giving back to the SFSC community, particularly the art department." The award provides \$400 to students for purchase of their art.

After earning his Associate in Arts degree from SFSC in 2009, Gooding graduated summa cum laude from

the University of Florida with a bachelor's degree in landscape architecture. An investor saw Gooding's work and was so impressed that he helped the new graduate start his own studio, The Max Gooding Company.

Gooding's life now revolves around growing his studio's business. He consults with businesses to create brands and logos, produces commercial art, and designs landscapes for high-end real estate developments. "Right now, you could say I am married to my business," said Gooding. "What little scraps of sleep I get I am sprawled on the couch recharging myself for my next creative endeavor."

"Max was an exceptional student who touched so many lives when he was at SFSC," said Mollie Doctrow, curator of the SFSC's Museum of Florida Art and Culture (MOFAC), who taught Gooding drawing. "He is remarkably talented, smart, hardworking, and involved. He contributed in so many ways to the art department, MOFAC, and SFSC."

Gooding collaborated with Doctrow in designing MOFAC's Wildflower Wayside Trail, a self-guided walking trail where visitors can explore pristine scrubland on SFSC's

Highlands Campus.

Now, Gooding plans to put his landscape design talents to work on SFSC's Highlands Campus. He is in the early stages of crafting a plan that would reconfigure the college's main entrance on U.S. 27. "It takes about 13 seconds for a vehicle to pass the college's entrance on the highway," Gooding noted. "That's 13 seconds to tell a story of 50 years of SFSC, and that's not much time."

Gooding's ardor for SFSC has earned him recognition. He recently received the prestigious LeRoy Collins Distinguished Alumni Rising Star Award, an honor given by the Florida Association of Colleges to graduates of the state's 28 state and community colleges who show significant achievement as well as support of their alma mater.

Gooding has a message for his fellow alumni.

"The alumni who have shared a similar experience and really soaked up the SFSC experience know the value of the college," Gooding said. "If they can't give back with money, then they should consider giving back with their time."

"Just going to a class and telling your story of success can make a difference for students," he said.

SFSC summer, fall registration continues

AVON PARK — It's not too early to register for 2016 summer and fall terms at South Florida State College. Student may register now for Summer Term 2016 classes. Summer classes begin May 6. Fall Term 2016 registration began on April 8 for students with over 20 credits, and open registration for all other students begins April 22. Fall classes begin Aug. 19.

The SFSC Welcome Center on the Highlands campus at Avon Park accepts walk-in registrations Monday – Thursday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Fridays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Students can also register at the DeSoto Campus in Arcadia, the Hardee Campus in Bowling Green, and at the Lake Placid Center in Lake Placid.

Returning students can register and pay for classes through the college portal, Panther Central. New students can apply for admission to the college by clicking the "Apply Now" button at the top of SFSC's home page at www.southflorida.edu.

Italian for Travelers course offered at SFSC

AVON PARK — "Italian for Travelers," is a class designed to teach the alphabet, numbers and basic conversation related to eating, shopping, hotel registration, and public transportation. The eight-week course will meet

Monday and Wednesdays, beginning May 2 and continuing through Wednesday, June 22. Class times are 5:30 – 6:30 p.m.

The cost is \$90, and the course number (CRN) is 30784. The course requires the purchase of the book, "Rick Steves' Italian Phrase Book and Dictionary," ISBN-13: 978-1612382012.

Register for classes in Building B, at the Highlands Campus or any SFSC campus or center. Registration can also be paid over the phone by calling 863-784-7405. For more information contact the Community Education Department

SFSC offers yoga

AVON PARK — The Corporate and Community Education department at South Florida State College will offer yoga classes on Thursdays through May 12 at the Highlands campus, 600 West College Drive.

Students will learn how to reduce stress, improve circulation, calm the emotions, re-align posture, and stimulate weight loss. Class times are 5:30 - 7 p.m. The cost is \$36, and the course number is (CRN) 21572.

Register for classes in Building B, at the Highlands Campus, Avon Park, or any SFSC campus or center. You can also register and pay over the phone by calling 863-784-7405.

Brown To Retire; New Dean Named

A new dean of applied sciences and technologies was appointed last week at South Florida State College.

Erik Christensen, currently professor of physics and chair of the natural sciences department, succeeds Hardee County resident Kevin Brown, who retires on May 31 after 17 years of service to SFSC.

Christensen started teaching at SFSC 12 years ago after retiring from a career in the U.S. Navy. He teaches physics and astronomy, and is popularly known for the night-time stargazing parties that draw students and area residents to the Highlands Campus.

"I am both honored and humbled as I step out of the classroom into administration," Christensen said. "But I am also excited at the prospect of putting my leadership skills to work helping the college and working with familiar, but still new, colleagues."

The dean of applied sciences and technologies oversees SFSC's many technical and occupational programs. From the auto body repair shop to the culinary arts kitchen to the air-conditioning, refrigeration, and heating technology pro-

gram, Christensen will shoulder responsibility for programs that place graduates to work in jobs throughout SFSC's tri-county service area and beyond.

He will also manage educational programs that call upon his areas of expertise: engineering and science.

For now, Christensen will close out his teaching responsibilities as the spring term at SFSC ends. He will work with Brown on the transition for the remainder of May and June. He officially takes up his new duties on July 1.



Christensen

SFSC initiative looks to attract more minority males to college

Nearly 200 students attended the half-day program Friday at the Highlands campus

BY MARC VALERO

Highlands Today

AVON PARK — Nearly 200 male students from the five high schools in DeSoto, Hardee and Highlands counties attended Friday's Minority Male Initiative at the South Florida State College Highlands Campus.

The initiative's goal is to en-

courage the students to return to SFSC or another college as a student.

SFSC Dean of Student Services Timothy Wise said the college worked with all five high schools and their leadership teams.

The project is a response to the dwindling number of males, especially minority males, on college campuses, not only at South Florida State College but across the state and country, he said.

SFSC representatives used to attend Hillsborough Communi-

MINORITY, Page 7



MARC VALERO/STAFF

A high school student attending Friday's Minority Male Initiative at South Florida State College receives a bag, with the program's agenda and information about the college, from Tara Jefferies, SFSC coordinator Farmworker Career Development Program.

SFSC commencement to be held in 2 ceremonies

Ceremonies slated for 4:45 and 7:45 p.m. Thursday

Special to Highlands Today

AVON PARK — This year, South Florida State College celebrates spring commencement in two ceremonies Thursday — at 4:45 p.m. and at 7:45 p.m. each — in the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts, Highlands Campus.

"We had a large number of graduates this year, so we decided to have two commencement ceremonies to provide students with the maximum number of seats for their guests in the performing arts center," said Timothy Wise, dean, Student Services.

This is the inaugural commencement for students in the Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education and Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing programs. The two programs were launched in fall 2014.

During the 4:45 p.m. ceremony, students earning their Associate in Arts and Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education degrees will march across the stage for their diplomas. The commencement speaker is Audrey May, who earns her AA degree.

The 7:45 p.m. ceremony features students who are earning their Bachelor of Applied Science degrees in Supervision and Management, Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing, Associate in Science degrees, occupational and college credit certificates, and those who will receive their Florida high school diplomas. The commencement speaker is Sharmin Jones, who earns her BSN degree.

Some 459 students will have met the SFSC graduation requirements for the spring com-



FILE PHOTO

This year, South Florida State College celebrates spring commencement in two ceremonies Thursday, at 4:45 p.m. and at 7:45 p.m. in the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts, Highlands Campus. Some 285 students will participate.

ment. Of these, 210 receive their AA, 55 receive their AS, 119 receive occupational certificates or college credit certificates, 14 receive their Florida high school diplomas, and 22 will receive a Bachelor of Applied Science. The Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing program will graduate 27 students, and the Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education program will graduate 12 students. Participating in the two commencement ceremonies will be 285 students.

Receptions will be held in the Catherine P. Cornelius Student Services and Classroom Complex (Building B) immediately following each of the commencement ceremonies.

Live online streaming, accessed by clicking a website banner at www.southflorida.edu, will allow friends and relatives to see everything from the processional to the last graduate crossing the stage. The stream begins at 4:30 and 7:30 p.m. EDT Thursday.

Mace bearer and chief marshal for this year's ceremony is Elizabeth Andrews, and marshals are Davida Austin, Thomas Bush, Kathleen Cappel, Dr. Cate Cover, Robert Hampton, Dr. Theresa James, Melanie Jackson, Michelle MacBeth, Claire Miller, Ricardo Pantoja and Lena Phelps.

The commencement rehearsal takes place at 10 a.m. Thursday in the Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts.

Community News



SFSC Panthers teach volleyball at ARC

AVON PARK — Members of the South Florida State College Lady Panthers volleyball team spent three weeks teaching volleyball to consumers at Ridge Area Arc during April. Consumers enjoyed playing volleyball with the Lady Panthers for three Fridays this past month. The team taught basic skills and played some games on the outdoor net. Players also worked indoors with those who had limited abilities to move by doing chair volleyball. Ridge Area Arc honored the team on April 22 with an appreciation party complete with cake and photo gifts. Arc consumers wished the players who are graduating good luck in their future. Some players are returning next season, so everyone was excited to hear that they will see them again. Coach Kim Crawford coordinated this effort. Ridge Area Arc consumer Frances Goff (in the front) helps to present the cake and gifts to members of the South Florida State College volleyball team. Her friend, Mary Beth Boudrias, developed a special friendship over the past year and Goff presented her with a picture of the two of them together.

SFSC offers test prep for new teachers

Special to Highlands Today

AVON PARK — South Florida State College has announced the availability of two test preparation classes for those interested in taking the Florida Teacher Certification Examination, more commonly known as the FTCE.

The two courses will focus on the General Knowledge Test, or GTK, which is one of the main components of the FTCE. The classes will run from early to mid-May at the SFSC University Center on the Highlands Campus in Avon Park.

Florida Department of Education requires prospective teachers to pass the GTK before entering a teacher education program at a college or university. SFSC is enrolling its next class of students for its Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education degree program that will start in August.

"This is the ideal time for people interested in a teaching career to address the testing requirement," said Maday Leon, the lead instruction in SFSC's elementary education teacher preparation program. "The college wants to go the extra mile in getting people ready to enter the profession and these GTK preparation courses are a big step for us."

SFSC's Department of Corporate and Community Education has scheduled two classes that will help applicants to attain a passing score. The six-hour FTCE General Knowledge English class will offer a review of grammar to help test-takers to pass the English language skills section of the GTK.

The class is offered in two-hour sessions on

three successive Saturday mornings: May 7, 14 or 21, from 8:30-10:30 a.m.

The FTCE General Knowledge Math class will guide test-takers through the problem-solving techniques to pass the mathematics section of the GTK.

This class is offered in two-hour sessions on three successive Saturday afternoons: May 7, 14 or 21, from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

The cost for each class is \$75. Test-takers can register for one or both classes, depending upon the areas they want to review.

To register for the classes, call (863) 784-7405 or email corporatetraining@southflorida.edu.

Test-takers registering for the course need the textbook, "CliffsNotes FTCE General Knowledge Test," which is available online.

SFSC launched its Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education program two years ago. Its first cohort of teachers will graduate on Thursday. All graduates finish the program with endorsements in ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) and reading, two credentials that school districts look for in new hires.

"We see these test preparation courses as a way to meet the demand for new teachers in our service district," Leon said. "By meeting that demand, we know there will be a benefit not only to the schools and the students, but the entire community."

To learn more about admission to this fall's Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education degree program, contact Leon at (863) 784-7154 or leonm@southflorida.edu.

Beating the Odds

Audrey May speaks of success
during SFSC commencement



COURTESY PHOTO

Audrey May will deliver the South Florida State College student commencement address on Thursday.

Audrey May, who is set to graduate from South Florida State College on Thursday, doesn't like statistics. More to the point, mathematics was her weakest subject.

But May knows enough about probability to realize hers was a longshot chance at picking up her Associate in Arts degree at SFSC's spring 4:45 p.m. Commencement ceremony.

But not only will May mount the stage at SFSC's afternoon ceremony for arts and sciences graduates to get her diploma, she will also take to the lectern to deliver the student commencement address.

May's journey to selection as the speaker starts in Philadelphia, moves to Okeechobee, takes a harrowing detour to Central America, before ending in Sebring, with stops in Miami and Houston along the way.

"I beat the odds to get to SFSC and finish up my associate degree," May said, while on SFSC's Highlands Campus after a day of classes. "Statistically speaking, people who started out where I started out don't end up where I am at now."

May was born in Philadelphia. Her parents had moved to the mainland from Puerto Rico in search of better jobs. But when she was 3 years old, her parents moved their six children to Okeechobee.

"We were a family of extremely modest means with my parents raising six children in a small house," May said.

As the youngest child, May was at the bottom of the pecking order, and worse she said, the object of abuse from an older sibling. In a fit of desperation and seeking safety, at age 13 she ran away from home. In search of a haven, May slept in the dug-out at the local baseball field. She helped herself to outfits drying on clotheslines to maintain an appearance of normality.

"As bad as things were, I kept going to school," May recounted, with tears welling up. "The other kids would make fun of me because of the way I dressed."

Rescue from her miserable straits came in the form of a man. May met an agricultural worker who offered her a measure of hope she could find love and safety.

The two moved to California to live with his family and had a child. Though life was often hard to mouth for the young couple, their child gave May a sense she had made the right move.

May went with the child's father to his ancestral village in El Salvador to visit his family and settle some business affecting his immigration status.

"It was all a trick," said May. "After three months, I said we had to go back for the baby's sake, but he ripped up my and the baby's passports."

May found herself trapped in the hinterland of El Salvador. Now the object of her husband's every whim. Her family grew.

"I became a campesina," May explained, using the Spanish word for a rural peasant. "I joined the village woman beating clothes on rocks in the

river. The same river from which we drew our water. The same river that collected the sewage."

With her children's bellies bloated from chronic intestinal infections brought on by the river's water, May was ecstatic when a band of Mormon missionaries swept into the village with medicine.

"As the missionaries were talking among themselves about how to treat the children, they noticed I understood what they were saying to each other," May said. "They were blown away to discover that I was an American."

After hearing of May's travails, they hatched a plot to bring her home. They agreed to meet by the river the next day, pretending they were reading the Bible so that they could plan May's escape without raising any suspicions among her husband's family.

The missionaries got May to the American embassy, where she was met with a frosty reception. Without any documentation from May, they weren't convinced she was an American.

"Not knowing what to do, I started reciting the pledge of allegiance and singing 'The Star-Spangled Banner,'" May said with her first sign of glee recounting her days of captivity. "That worked

like magic."

The embassy arranged for May and her four children to exit El Salvador and resettle in Miami, where she had to readjust to life in a county she had not seen in nearly 10 years.

"Wow, it was both wonderful and crazy to be back home," May said. "From Miami I went to Houston, where family lived."

May's family in Houston could not cope with the young children. Her only option was a shelter. She took it.

The shelter proved a boon for May. The staff arranged for childcare, helped May land a part-time job bagging groceries, and got her enrolled in high school classes.

"My life was work, school, off to the childcare, then back to the shelter," May said. "But it was a stable environment and, after finishing high school, they helped me enroll in the local community college and graduate from a study medical-assisting program."

After working full-time at a hospital, May saved enough money to move to Highlands County, a community she said she knew was a great place to raise a family.

"My first priority was to get a job," May said. "I got hired on at Florida Hospital in their lab because of my hospital experience

in Texas." She found an apartment, and she started taking classes at SFSC.

May had set her sights on starting the nursing program at SFSC. She knew she had to make her way through a bevy of science and general education courses with good grades to gain a spot in the program.

May experienced ups and downs. "I really enjoyed the science classes and the engagement with the faculty, who really cared if their students succeeded," she said. "But I had one problem: math."

May had to pass college algebra. She signed

up for the section taught by James McBride, an instructor who has taught the class to hundreds of SFSC students. She failed. May signed up again with the same instructor. She failed. May signed up again and chose McBride for a third time. She failed.

"I kept getting closer each time, but I just couldn't break through point where I would pass," May said. "So, I went back to McBride and my guidance counselor, Kim Heller, for a solution."

McBride said he recommended May take the course as an independent study class so that

she could work at her own pace. "She kept coming back and back — she was bent on passing the course," McBride said. May's determination to earn the credits for mathematics. "I typically do not recommend independent study, but May worked with me one-on-one over many sessions and in the end she passed the course."

While May was working her way through SFSC's Associate in Arts degree program, she continued at her lab job at Florida Hospital and caring for her children at an apart-

May

From Page 5

ment in Avon Park. "There was this guy who worked in the emergency room who was keeping tabs on me," May said. "I thought he was spooky because he kept showering me with attention."

After six months avoiding him, May agreed to go out on a date. "I thought this guy is going to run once he finds out I am single mom with a whole brood of kids," May said. "During our dinner date, I laid it out for him. He said 'that's OK' and I am like stunned."

Brandon May, whose mother, Eileen May, heads up the Lake Placid Chamber of Commerce, married Audrey in a ceremony she never dreamed would happen. Pulling up a Facebook picture of herself at the altar, May said: "This is something I thought was just not possible. Brandon was a gift from God." May has forged a close bond with her father in law, Buddy, finally finding a father figure.

They soon added children to the 'brood.' Working, married and a mother to a growing family, May

kept plugging away at earning the credits toward her associate degree at SFSC. "After a few years of working with my amazing supervisor and the lab director at Florida Hospital, they helped me decide to move away from nursing toward biomedical sciences," May said. With college algebra out of the way, May picked up the pace, taking more classes in order to clinch her associate degree this spring.

"My focus at SFSC centered on my two-year degree so that I could enter Adventist Health Sciences University biomedical sciences bachelor's degree program this fall," May said. A degree in biomedical sciences will build on May's work experience in the lab, giving her an opportunity to increase her earnings working in a hospital-based lab.

"Without the extra help from the dedicated instructors like Mr. McBride, the tutors like Enrique Ramos in SFSC's Learning Resources Center, and all the support I got from Kim Hemler in the Advising and Counseling Center, I likely would never have kept at it," May said, as she pondered what might have been.

With that thought in mind, May

nominated herself as commencement speaker. She said she had a story to tell, one that touched both on her personal triumph and the part SFSC played in her success. But there's a third reason May has for using her life's story as the basis for the commencement address.

"Yes, I want the audience to hear that statistically speaking I should have been a woman who never would have made it this far," May said. "But my most important audience will be my children on that night."

"I want my kids to know I dedicate my degree to them. If Mom can get her education after all that she has been through, then they can do it too."

SFSC will hold two commencement ceremonies this spring. An afternoon ceremony for art and sciences graduates is at 4:45 p.m. and a ceremony for applied sciences and technologies, health sciences, and high school diploma graduates is at 7:45 p.m.. Both ceremonies will take place in the Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts on SFSC's Highlands Campus, 600 W. College Drive, in Avon Park.

'Steam Powered Innovation' show opens today at SFSC

SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-SUN

AVON PARK — South Florida State College's Museum of Florida Art and Culture will present "Steam Powered Innovation," a juried student art show, April 6 through April 28, in the museum's gallery on the college's Highlands Campus.

The show features drawings, paintings, computer-generated graphics, relief prints, and pottery from more than two dozen SFSC art students.

"We put on an annual show to give the students an opportunity to present their work in a professional setting," said Mollie Doctrow, MOFAC's curator, who also teaches drawing and graphics classes at SFSC.

Doctrow noted the show offers an ideal opportunity for the public to purchase reasonably priced art. "Visitors will see quite excellent art," Doctrow said. "They will find

some good deals on work from rising artists."

SFSC's art students chose the title of the show and promotional graphics, assisted with matting and framing the artwork, and installed the pieces.

"We went with 'Steam Powered' because the show has a sense of combining old time technology with modern concepts," said Amy Brumfield, a first year student in the art program who has one of her pieces of art in the show.

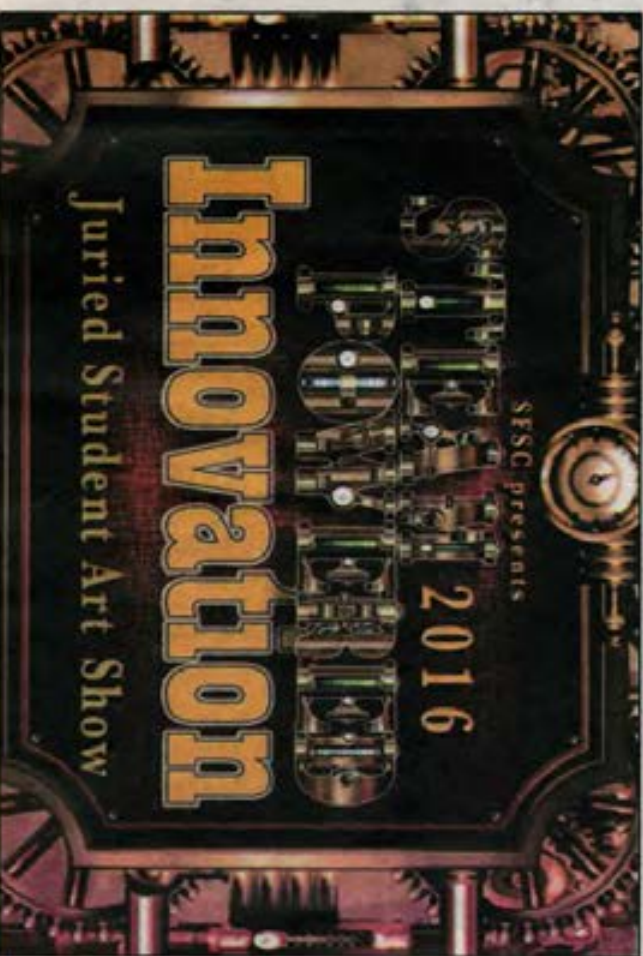
A students' awards ceremony and reception will be held on April 21, 12:30-2:30 p.m., in MOFAC's galleries. The Tanglewood Art League will present their annual scholarship award to an outstanding art student. The public is invited to attend.

Students will also receive one of several Max Gooding Awards that will be used to purchase student art of exceptional quality

for the SFSC Student Art Collection. This award is made possible by SFSC alumni Max Gooding. A student will receive the MOFAC Docents Art Award, created to recognize a student who has achieved artistic excellence and contributed to MOFAC and the art department.

The show is sponsored SFSC district board trustee Joe Wright and his wife Suzanne, former SFSC dean Doug Andrews and his wife Elizabeth, and the SFSC Foundation.

MOFAC opens its galleries to the public on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, 12:30-4:30 p.m., or by appointment for group tours. Patrons of the Wildstein Center may visit the museum one hour prior to matinee and evening performances. For more information about MOFAC and its exhibitions, visit www.mofac.org, or contact Mollie Doctrow at 863-784-7240.



X SFSC falls in 10 innings

Panthers' Saturday
game called in 7th
with score tied

Highlands Today Sports Staff

The Suncoast Conference baseball standings are pretty tight, which means there are plenty of evenly matched teams fighting for one of the top four spots in order to advance to the state tournament. That was evident by the South Florida State College Panthers baseball team, as it dropped a 10-9, 10-inning game to Florida Southwestern at Panther Field on Friday and then saw Saturday's conference game with State College of Florida halted in the seventh inning due to rain with the score tied at 4.



McClure

With all six teams having played 15 games, St. Petersburg College is leading the way with a 10-5 conference record, followed by Polk State College at 9-6. The Panthers are all alone in third place with an 8-7 record, with State College of Florida sitting in the final play-off spot with a 7-8 record. Florida Southwestern is 6-9 and Hillsborough Community College is 5-10.

So while the Panthers are just two games out of first place, they're also just two games in front of the fifth-place team, which will make for some meaningful games down the stretch.

On Friday, the Panthers watched an early 4-1 lead evaporate in the top of the third, as the Buccaneers scored three times to tie the score and took the lead in the top of the fourth with a run, only to see the Panthers storm back with five runs in the bottom of the fourth.

Florida Southwestern answered with four runs in the top of the fifth before the pitchers took con-

SFSC

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game with a run in the top of the 10th inning.

Kevin Coleman did a solid job in relief, allowing just one

run in 3 2/3 innings, while fanning seven, but the Panthers couldn't mount anything offensively in the second half of the game.

Harrison McClure led the Panthers offensively with a pair of doubles and three

RBI. Hernando Sierra had a pair of hits and John Tatum and Tobias Culpepper both scored a pair of runs.

Coach Rick Hitt's team will be at home tonight for the second game in a three-game series against State Col-

lege of Florida and the Panthers return to Bradenton on Wednesday.

South Florida State College will begin a three-game series with conference-leading Petersburg College on Friday at Panther Field.

RECOGNIZING GOOCH

South Florida State College will recognize former head baseball coach **Clay Gooch** on Friday, April 15, just prior to its 6 p.m. game against Hillsborough Community College of Tampa.

All SFSC fans, family members and friends are invited to come out and help the Panthers recognize Gooch, who will throw out the ceremonial first pitch.



MARK PINSON/STAFF

South Florida State College shortstop Katlyn Vega waits for the throw as St. Petersburg College's Ashley Spell steals second base during Tuesday's first game at Panther Field.

Panthers split with Titans

South Florida wins nightcap but out of playoff race

BY MARK PINSON
Highlands Today

AVON PARK — The South Florida State College softball team finished the season on a high note by winning its final game by a score of 2-0 over St. Petersburg College on Tuesday at Panther Field.

The Titans won the first game by a score of 9-1, which dropped South Florida to 23-24 overall and 5-14 in Suncoast Conference play. The loss eliminated the Panthers from postseason play.

"This is a great group of girls," said South Florida softball coach Carlos Falla. "I'm proud of the way they fought and battled all season and never gave up. It was disappointing to lose and be eliminated from the postseason,

In the 2-0 win, South Florida's Stephanie Norris started and got the win against the Titans.

Shelby Press contributed an RBI hit and Norris helped her own cause with a run-scoring hit.

"We swung the bats well," said Falla. "We had nine hits, put the ball in play and Hannah Lollis came in and closed the game out."

In the first game, St. Petersburg jumped on top in the second inning as Macy Rodriguez singled, moved to second base on a ground out and scored on Nicole Kovalsky's single to center field. Keeley Mayers doubled to left-center field to plate Kovalsky to put the Titans up by a score of 2-0.

South Florida answered in the bottom of the frame as Nicole



Softball

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down the right-field line and scored on a ground out by Rachel Reinbott to pull the Panthers within 2-1.

St. Petersburg erupted in the top of the third inning against South Florida right-hander Haley Pinterich.

Ashley Spell had a two-run single up the middle, Kovalsky aided her own cause with a two-run single, and Mayers capped the inning with a two-run double to put the Titans up by a score of 8-1.

South Florida had several runners on base over the next three innings, but Kovalsky, a hard-throwing right-hander, was able to escape each jam unscathed.

St. Petersburg tacked on a run in the top of the fifth inning to extend its lead to 9-1.

South Florida had two batters reach base in the bottom of the inning, but Kovalsky slammed the door shut to se-



MARK PINSON/STAFF

South Florida's Christine Colli slides in safely with a triple during Tuesday's game against St. Petersburg College.

cure the conference victory for the Titans.

"Haley pitched great against St. Petersburg in some other games but for some reason we just didn't get it done," said Falla. "St. Petersburg had a lot of bloopers and hits that found a hole, but

they look like line drives in the scorebook. They scored the runs they needed, and one run by us isn't going to win many college softball games."

Despite the loss, the future looks bright for the Panthers.

"We have 13 girls coming back for next year," said Falla. "We were very young this year, but the girls got a lot of playing time and gained a lot of experience. They played hard, but we just have to get better if we want to make the state playoffs."

With so many girls returning for next year, South Florida is looking for a few special players during the offseason.

"Usually I'm looking for a bunch of girls, but this year we're looking to fill certain needs," Falla said. "It's nice to have so many players returning because they know what to expect from me, how competitive college softball is and what it takes to be successful. I really enjoy coaching this group and I'm looking forward to next year."

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ALLEN MOODY/STAFF

Sebring players with their parents, from left: Jimmy Peck, Jordan Austin and David DeGenaro pose for a photo at Firemen's Field on Friday to announce their college signings.

Three Streaks sign with colleges

Austin, DeGenaro, Peck ink deals to continue baseball careers

BY ALLEN MOODY
Highlands Today

SEBRING — The Sebring Blue Streaks baseball squad is more of a family than a team, and it shows in what they do both on and off the field. When something good happens for a fellow Blue Streak, the entire team is there to celebrate the occasion. And that's what took place Friday night, as the entire Sebring baseball team was on hand to recognize the college signings of Jordan Austin, David DeGenaro and Jimmy Peck.

Austin will be playing for Rick Hitt's Sebring Florida State College Panthers

while Peck will be heading to Flagler College in St. Augustine. DeGenaro will be making the longest trip, loading up his new winter clothing and heading to Nyack College in New York.

"I'm proud of those three guys academically, as well as athletically," said Sebring coach Jasone DeWitt. "They've been able to balance what it takes to be a true student-athlete."

DeWitt said it's great to see the three players move on and he was hopeful several of their teammates would be following suit in the near future.

Jordan Austin

Austin has been a fixture for the Blue

Streaks in centerfield and not only helps produces runs, but keeps them off the scoreboard with his ability to get to balls hit in the gap that seem uncatchable.

"He's a spark plug for us and a guy who makes things happen on the bases," DeWitt said. "He runs balls down for gap to gap. Coach Hitt is getting a great young man and a great athlete, as well. The things he does on the field and in the clubhouse, he really continues to lead our guys. For me, it's nice to have had him around for three years."

Austin said staying close to his family was a big reason for wanting to sign with

Streaks

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the Panthers and he had already committed to the team before the start of the season.

"I didn't want to go too far away and playing in your home town, it doesn't get any better than that," Austin said. "Staying close to home, all my family can see me play and I like the school. I think I can fit in with what they're trying to do."

Austin said having former teammate Matt Portis entering his sophomore year next season will be an added bonus.

"He'll definitely help me out a lot getting used to the college level," he said.

Austin said he knows nothing is going to be given to him, and he'll have to show up and fight for a position in the Panthers' outfield, which is exactly the way he wants it.

"I know I'm going to have to go in there and compete," he said. "I wouldn't want to just show up and play. I want to earn it."

He said it's great to see several of his teammates also moving on to play in college, and he couldn't have asked for a better group of guys to grow up with and play baseball with, ranging from the time they were first Dixie Youth Baseball World Series champions to now.

Austin said his parents have been a real blessing and have gone above and beyond the call of duty.

"I want to thank my parents for supporting me in every baseball thing I've done and driving me all over this state," he said. "It definitely paid off. I have to thank all my coaches and all my friends and family for supporting me and always believing in me."

David DeGenaro

DeGenaro was looking at some Division II college in the state, but said things somehow managed to fall through, which he is now thankful for. He received a phone call from Nyack College, asking him to send some video that led to a visit, and he was hooked.

"I went there on a visit and turned out to love it," he said. "It's a new area, which I'm really excited about. Living in Florida my entire life it will be



ALLEN MOODY/STAFF

Sebring players, coaches and school officials surround Jimmy Peck, Jordan Austin and David DeGenaro to announce their college signings at Firemen's Field on Friday.

a big change, but I'm looking forward to it."

DeWitt said DeGenaro's willingness to do whatever it took to better himself was unbeatable.

"His work ethic for the three years I've been here is unbelievable," DeWitt said. "He's a guy who puts in extra time and works hard and it's paid off for him."

DeGenaro said his season started off a bit shaky, but DeWitt's faith in him never wavered and DeGenaro had a breakthrough season, both on the mound and at the plate.

"He started getting more confidence as the season went on at the plate and on the mound and he was very capable of doing what he did this year," DeWitt said. "I'm proud of him and he's going to be a big part, whether he's on the mound or over at third and swinging it, for us as well."

DeGenaro said once he stopped worrying about the things he couldn't control, things started clicking for him and he'll primarily be a pitcher in his freshman season with the Warriors, with the possibility of playing some in the infield, while he'll have more opportunities to play in the field every day beginning in his sophomore season.

He said it would be a bit strange not having his teammates beside him at first.

"I love these guys, I grew up with them," he said. "There's a lot of bonds, a lot of friendships and even if you didn't get along, we worked it out as brothers. I value my

teammates so greatly because I knew they were never going to cheat me; they weren't going to cheat me in the cage, they weren't going to cheat me in the weight room; we were all going to give it our best every day because we knew we would hold each other accountable for it."

DeGenaro said Coach DeWitt has been great to play for and he was grateful his Dixie coaches Dean Frazier and Jim Peck (Jimmy's father) for instilling the value of hard work in him at an early age.

"I'm thankful to my coaches, friends and family for their support," he said.

Jimmy Peck

Peck is a force behind the plate and has more responsibilities as catcher than the majority of college catchers.

"He loves being back there and he does a great job with our pitchers," DeWitt said. "We've turned it over to him these last two years and he calls pitches unless there's something we definitely wanted then we would call it. He's handled them well. He had some young guys last year without a lot of experience and he was able to settle them down in big situations."

"He's a captain out there on the defensive side of the game and he knows what he needs to do with guys out there in certain positions. We don't have a lot of teams who try to steal on us because of his pop times."

Peck said he takes pride in his defense and it's something he works on every day.

"That's pretty much every

single day; blocking, receiving, transfers, throw to second," Peck said. "I love my defense. I take a lot of pride in my hitting, too. It isn't what it's been in the past, obviously, but I'll work on it. It's a mental thing."

Peck said he thought he would be seen by college scouts with his summer travel ball team, which played at a number of the bigger venues, but his offer came as a result of a two-day camp at Flagler.

"We played some scrimmage games with the guys who were there and Coach Jonathan Holt, their recruiting coordinator and pitching coach, said 'we really like you, we like your size, your power and how you move behind the plate and we can just tell you're a leader,'" Peck said. "They called me two days later and offered and I love the area up there and the coaches, the field."

DeWitt said there's no doubt that Peck will do just fine with the Saints.

"Those guys at Flagler are great coaches and he's going to continue to develop and the future is pretty bright for him," DeWitt said. "He hasn't peaked with his ability."

Peck said it will be a change not having his Sebring teammates with him.

"It will really be weird," he said. "This group, we've been together since we were knee-high to a grasshopper, but I've played with completely different teams over the summer in travel ball; kids from California, North Carolina, Georgia, so I think I'll fit in pretty well."

Panthers Awards Day

The South Florida State College athletic department will be hosting their 2016 Awards Day on Tuesday in the University Center auditorium and lobby. The athletic department will be recognizing all student athletes for their contributions to the 2015-16 athletic season at 4 p.m. in the auditorium, followed by a reception in the lobby with snacks and drinks. All fans, parents, friends and SFSC employees are welcome to attend. There is no charge to attend this event, nor are reservations required.

Summer volleyball camps planned

AVON PARK — South Florida State College will hold summer volleyball camps throughout June and July. Camp is open to all ages and will be split into three sessions. The first session runs June 13 to 16, and the second runs from June 27 to June 30. The third session is July 11 to 14. Camp runs from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and 2 p.m. to 5:15 p.m. Cost is \$100 per week or \$30 per daily session. Applications can be found at <http://www.southflorida.edu/athletics/volleyball>.

Baseball camps set for SFSC

AVON PARK — South Florida State College is offering two summer baseball camps from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. each day. The camps are Mondays through Thursdays, from June 6 to 9 and June 20 to 23. Registration will take place between 8 and 8:30 a.m. Cost is \$80 for each camp. Both can be attended for \$150. Camps are for ages 5 to 14. Cost includes T-shirts for all campers. Camps will focus on offensive and defensive fundamentals, baseball-oriented agility and game situations. For more information, call Panther coach/AD Rick Hitt at (863) 784-7036, email hitt@southflorida.edu or visit www.southflorida.edu/baseball.

COLLEGES: SOUTH FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE BASEBALL

Panthers boxed in by national power Polk State

By **MARY KAY BERNARD**
CORRESPONDENT

AVON PARK — Having earned a state ranking amid an 18-8 start earlier this year, the South Florida State College Panthers are now trying to scratch and claw their way to a plus-.500 finish.

SFSC baseball team's recent late-season slide continued on Friday when it lost to national power Polk State College 10-1 in a rain-shortened game at Panther Field. It was SFSC's third consecutive loss.

Six innings were

enough to beat SFSC in its latest outing as the visiting Eagles (35-13 overall, 20-7 Suncoast Conference) clinched the conference title for the third straight year.

"It's a very frustrating situation, to say the least," said SFSC coach Rick Hitt. "Pitching-wise, we've struggled immensely. We struggled earlier this year, but we were able to compensate for that offensively. We just haven't been able to do that here in the second half."

The loss dropped the Panthers' record to

UP NEXT

* **Who:** South Florida State College at Florida SouthWestern State College.

* **When:** Today, 6 p.m.

* **Where:** Fort Myers.

26-26 after storming to an 18-8 mark to start the season.

Their latest setback, once again, could be attributed to pitching struggles as SFSC starter Jason Plyn lasted just 2/3 of an inning and gave up four runs, but only one was earned.

A home run started things off for the Eagles, who are ranked third in the state and

18th in the nation. Then, with two outs, an error in the outfield, a double and two walks led to three more runs for Polk State.

The Eagles added three more earned runs in the second and third innings off pitcher Cody Spencer on four hits and two walks.

South Florida State's Jarred Neal then

relieved Spencer and the Eagles tacked on three more runs on four hits, including a home run, in the fourth inning.

The Panthers' final pitcher, Kevin Coleman, finally was able to shut the door on the Eagles' offense and pitched 2 2/3 innings, allowing just one hit.

"It's been a common theme, unfortunately, throughout the year," Hitt said. "We've given up an awful lot of runs. Some days we've been able to score some runs and counteract that, but most days

that hasn't occurred."

In Friday's game, the Panthers scored their only run in the second inning when Hernando Sierra doubled, advanced to third on a sacrifice fly by Equon Smith, and came home on a fielder's choice by Quentin Davis.

In the third, Panther John Tatum was stranded at third base. Other than that, only Sierra reached first base safely in the final three innings. Sierra went 2-for-2 with a double and a run scored. SFSC's Matt Portis went 1-for-2.



ALLEN MOODY/STAFF

The South Florida State College Panthers celebrate their 10-inning victory over Florida Southwestern at Panther Field on Monday.

Panthers win home finale

South Florida loses lead late, but rallies for victory

BY ALLEN MOODY
Highlands Today

AVON PARK — Winning hasn't necessarily come easy for South Florida State College Panthers, but on Monday they found a way to get the job done in their last game of the season at Panther Field.

After watching a 4-1 ninth-inning lead turn into a 5-4 deficit, the Panthers tied the game in the bottom of the ninth and won in the bottom of the 10th on Evan Shaffner's walk-off base hit.

"That's true college baseball," said South Florida coach Rick Hitt. "Every day is a different day."

The Panthers (27-26 overall) were swinging the bats well right from the start, although a first-inning single by To-

bias Culpepper and Harrison McClure's first-inning double went for naught.

The Panthers got on the scoreboard with two outs in the bottom of the second, as Hernando Sierra was hit by a pitch and Shaffner walked. Both runners advanced on a passed ball and Eric Schulte brought them home with a two-run single.

The Panthers doubled their lead in the bottom of the third, as John Tatum singled and stole second. McClure delivered an RBI double and Dalton Scarbrough followed with an RBI double of his own to make it 4-0.

South Florida starter Juan Terron sailed through the first four innings, allowing only one hit, and was able to get

PANTHERS, Page 2



ALLEN MOODY/STAFF

South Florida State College pitcher Juan Terron threw 6 2/3 solid innings Monday.

Panthers

From Page 1

out of a two-on jam in the top of the sixth.

In the seventh, the Buccaneers were able to get on the scoreboard with an unearned run, but reliever Scott Bellina shut the door without any additional damage. Bellina pitched a scoreless eighth inning and the Panthers still maintained their 4-1 lead.

"I thought Juan Terron, our starter, did a really good job," Hitt said. "We've had back-to-back two well-started games, with Jonathan Struck this past weekend, and Juan tonight. Juan's pitch count got to the point where he needed to go and Scott Bellina had a good two innings and had some arm tightness and we got him out of there."

In the top of the ninth inning, McClure came into the game and walked the first batter and hit the next. A walk to John O' Connor was followed by JD Dutka's fourth home run of the season and the grand slam gave the Buccaneers a 5-4 lead. Austin Haworth got the final two outs of the inning.

"We put the ball in Harry's hands, and obviously you feel comfortable with the ball in your closer's hands, and tonight it just didn't work out for him," Hitt said. "But his teammates picked him up and that's an important part of playing a team sport is finding a way to overcome adversity. We've had some difficulty doing that down the stretch and tonight I was glad to see them bounce back after that."



ALLEN MOODY/STAFF

South Florida State College's Tobias Culpepper steals third base before Florida Southwestern's Jett Swetland can make the tag in Monday's game.

Culpepper drew a one-out walk and advanced to second. With two outs McClure hit a slow roller towards second for an infield single and Culpepper kept running, scoring when the throw home was in the dirt to tie the score.

Quentin Davis reached on an error to start the bottom of the 10th and advanced to second on a wild pitch. Jarred Neal dropped down a perfect sacrifice bunt to advance Davis to third. After a walk to Alfred Brown, Shaffner drilled a pitch to the left-centerfield gap and Davis scored the winning run.

Hitt said it was nice for his seniors

to go out with a win in their final home game.

"They're a good bunch of guys and they're an enjoyable group of guys," he said. "You really want good things to happen for them. We've been a little bit short on the mound for a little while and tried to slug our way to victory some days and it hasn't worked out the way you draw it up, but it's not from a lack of effort."

The Panthers will close out the season today against Florida Southwestern in Fort Myers. Max Boling is expected to get the start for South Florida.