

Pygmy Fringe Tree Wildflower Festival

A photograph of a person walking away from the camera on a dirt path. The path is covered with small, colorful wildflowers. The person is wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt and dark pants. The background is a field of similar wildflowers under a bright sky.

A walk through time

MOFAC to host festival March 9

SPECIAL TO HIGHLANDS NEWS-SUN

AVON PARK — South Florida State College's Museum of Florida Art and Culture (MOFAC) plays host to the Pygmy Fringe Tree Wildflower Festival, a celebration of the region's native wildflowers, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Thursday, March 9, on SFSC's Highlands Campus, Avon Park.

The festival kicks off with guided walks through SFSC's Wayside Shrine Trail, a footpath winding its way through pristine scrubland on the college's campus. The tract, blanketed by fine white sand and overspread with shrubs, is home

to native wildflowers that bloom in early March.

"The Wayside Shrine Trail on the SFSC Highlands Campus offers the public an easily accessible venue with which to view this rare and extraordinary shrub," said Megan Stepe, MOFAC's curator. "This beautiful plant flowers in early March, so now is the time take in this wonderful event."

Leading the walking tours will be Dustin Angell, a conservation photographer and education coordinator from Archbold Biological Station. He will be joined by Claire Miller, an SFSC librarian, and Diana Cleghorn, a member of

SFSC's Information Technology Department.

The festival takes its name from the pygmy fringe tree (*Chionanthus pygmaeus*), a now rare flowering shrub that grows between three and six feet tall. The pygmy fringe tree once thrived throughout central Florida. But farming and development nearly swept it from the region, prompting the federal government to declare it an endangered species in 1987.

The trail was conceived by Mollie Doctrow, a former



One of six shrine boxes along the Wayside Shrine Trail. Each box has information of the plant, a notebook for visitors to record their impressions, and a plant image in relief so that visitors can make a rubbing on paper as a memento of their visit.

PYGMY

FROM PAGE 1

curator at MOFAC and an award-winning artist whose work revolves around capturing natural habitats. The trail opened in 2011.

The public can also glimpse other native plants flowering along the trail: the big flag pawpaw, sky-blue lupine,

and another endangered species, the scrub St. Johns Wort.

This year's festival includes storytelling by Florida Seminole songwriter Rita Youngman and storytelling and song by Florida folklorist Carol Mahler. Photography walks will be led by Karla Respress, an art instructor in SFSC's Art Department.

Visitors to the trail can write their impressions in notebooks found in

INFORMATION

For more information on the festival, call 863-784-7240 or follow the events link on MOFAC's website at mofac.org.

wooden shrine boxes along the path. The boxes, designed by Doctrow, contain information that showcases the shrubs and wildflowers.

One side of each box has a plant image in relief, allowing visitors to



COURTESY PHOTOS

The pygmy fringe tree flowering.

make a rubbing on paper as a memento of their visit. Rubbing kits will be available for purchase, with proceeds going to SFSC art club.

Members of the Audubon Society and the Ridge Rangers will be on hand to answer questions from the public. Visitors will find members from the Lake Placid Art League along the trail doing plein air, or open air painting of the shrubs.

Visitors can purchase lunch from local food truck Loafin' Around, who will set up a food tent at the site.

A walk through the trail gives visitors a chance to see the land, known as the Lake Wales Ridge, as it existed for centuries. The ridge, an ancient beach and sand dune system formed 1-3 million years ago, has been home to flora that has struggled to survive against development.

The guided walks start from the MOFAC's entrance adjacent to the Wildstein Theater for the Performing Arts at 11 a.m. Take Entrance 3 from College Drive to reach MOFAC. SFSC's Highlands Campus is located at 600 W. College Drive, Avon Park.

The trail is open to the public during regular college hours. To reach the trail, visitors should look for Entrance 5 along College Drive.

SFSC students named Siemens Technical Scholars

SPECIAL TO THE HIGHLANDS
NEWS-SUN

AVON PARK — South Florida State College (SFSC) students Melissa Acosta of Highlands County and Angelina Avila of DeSoto County have been named 2017 Siemens Technical Scholars by the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program (CEP) and the Siemens Foundation.

Acosta and Avila were among 51 exceptional community college students selected from some of the nation's strongest state and community college programs in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), which provide outstanding preparation for high-demand jobs in

advanced manufacturing, energy, healthcare, and information technology.

Acosta graduated from SFSC's Associate in Science Degree in Nursing program (ADN) in 2016 and works in Tampa as a Registered Nurse in a hospital emergency room.

"Melissa displays excellent leadership skills, a passion for nursing, and dedication to lifelong learning," said Michele Heston, SFSC dean of Health Sciences. "She was a model student and will continue to shine in any career path she chooses."

Avila is a student in SFSC's ADN program and will graduate in June.

"In a word, Angelina is awesome," Heston said. "She will be an asset to the healthcare workforce in our service



ACOSTA

district. "Angelina plans to continue her employment at DeSoto Memorial Hospital as a Registered Nurse."

As Siemens Technical Scholars, Acosta and Avila will each receive scholarships of \$3,500 to continue their education. Acosta plans to use her scholarship award to repay student loans.



AVILA

Because of the Siemens scholarship, she is able to pursue an advanced degree sooner and without debt. She has already applied to the University of South Florida's Family Nurse Practitioner program.

Avila will use her scholarship to pay for her final term tuition, books, and licensing examination

fees and said, "I can now apply for the Bachelor of Science Degree in Nursing program at SFSC sooner than I thought."

The Siemens Technical Scholars selection committee identified exemplary state and community college STEM programs, like SFSC's Nursing program, that deliver exceptional training for technical STEM jobs in areas ranging from healthcare to power plant technology.

"The ultimate outcome of the Associate Degree Nursing program at SFSC is to prepare graduates for contemporary practice," Heston said. "Program graduates hold a variety of positions in the community, such as nursing directors of

long-term care facilities, clinical education directors, nurse managers at a variety of facilities, corrections nurses, hospice nurses, and nursing faculty."

"The best community college programs are providing top-notch preparation for the jobs employers are clamoring to fill," said David Etzwiler, CEO of Siemens Foundation. "We need to change the mind-set about community colleges and make sure that students, parents, and college guidance counselors see these exceptional STEM programs as strong pathways to opportunity, whether that means heading right into a great paying job or getting a more advanced degree."

SFSC's Corporate Education offering training

SPECIAL TO
HIGHLANDS NEWS-SUN

AVON PARK — South Florida State College's Corporate Education Department is offering a variety of classes for the 2017 Spring term.

In Introduction to Microsoft Excel 2016, learn to create, format, save, and print basic spreadsheets, formulas, and charts. This

workshop is offered on Tuesday, March 7, 5:30-9 p.m., SFSC Highlands campus. The cost is \$95, and the course number (CRN) is 20498.

In Intermediate Microsoft Excel 2016, learn to and utilize Excel tables, filter, sorting and pivot tables, and more complex formulas as IF, SUMIF, COUNTIF, and FLASH FILL formulas. The course is offered on

Tuesday, March 21, 5:30-9 p.m., SFSC Highlands campus. The cost is \$95, and the course number (CRN) is 21353.

In Advanced Microsoft Excel 2016, learn to import data into excel, create relationships between tables, use LOOKUP and cross-sheet formulas. The course is offered on Tuesday, March 28, 5:30-9 p.m. The cost is \$95,

and the course number (CRN) is 21354.

In Intermediate QuickBooks 2016, learn how to customize QuickBooks, track time, set up and use payroll, pay liabilities and taxes, purchase and manage inventory, building inventory assessment, and track sales orders and back orders. This course is offered as a two-day workshop:

Wednesday, March 22, and Wednesday, March 29, from 7-9 p.m. The cost is \$169, and the course number (CRN) is 20663.

Register in Building B at the Highlands campus or any SFSC campus or center. For more information, contact Corporate Education at 863-784- 7033 or email corporatetraining@southflorida.edu.

SFSC scholars make presentations at state conferences

SPECIAL TO
HIGHLANDS NEWS-SUN

AVON PARK — On Feb. 26, five South Florida State College students had a chance to attend two statewide conferences that recognized students for academic achievement. Fortunately, for the students, both conferences were held in the same city, giving them an opportunity to take in both meetings at the same time.

The SFSC students were in Jacksonville for the Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) regional conference. PTK, an international society of student scholars, recognizes its members for academic achievement, providing opportunities for them to grow as scholars and leaders.

At the same time, the Florida Collegiate Honors Conference held its annual statewide meeting for students and faculty from the state's collegiate Honors Programs.

"SFSC students enrolled in the Honors Program typically also belong to PTK," said Dr. Sonji Nicholas, the advisor for SFSC's PTK chapter. "So, the five students were able to present their research at both conferences and pick up their awards at



COURTESY PHOTO

SFSC PTK advisor Michelle Macbeth, from left, SFSC students Melissa Garcia, Kelsey Pena, PTK International President Andrew Porter, SFSC student Krystal Santos, and PTK advisor Sonji Nicholas, receiving the chapter award.

the PTK conference."

Students from the SFSC Honors Program's freshman research writing class, taught by Charlotte Pressler, presented the results of their scholarly work at the Honors Conference.

Rodrigo Gracia discussed his narrative that delved into the 1967 Apollo I fire. One of the early setbacks to overtake the United States' space program, it took the lives of three astronauts.

But, in the long run, it strengthened the safety and success of NASA's Apollo program.

Michael Grey described the importance of Florida's "Cow Cavalry" to the outcome Civil War. As the Confederate forces faced a steady onslaught from the Union armies, Florida's cattlemen herded cattle north in a desperate bid to keep Confederate soldiers supplied with beef.

Pressler, who heads

up the SFSC Honors Program, organized a roundtable for her fellow program directors from two-year colleges. Roundtable participants discussed the barriers and opportunities Honors Program students face when transferring to four-year colleges.

At the PTK conference, students from a fall term honors seminar taught by Sonji Nicholas presented their research. The three students researched

issues centering on marriage and family across cultures.

Nicholas said they researched the demographic characteristics of Highlands County immigrant groups. Their aim was to aid Healthy Families Highlands, a parenting support program, to better reach immigrant families.

Kelsey Peña and Krystal Santos presented research describing the demographics of

immigrant families from Mexico, and Melissa Garcia delivered a similar talk on Haitian immigrant families.

SFSC's PTK chapter received recognition as the Most Improved Chapter at the society's conference. Students participate in a Five Star Chapter Plan, with chapters vying to earn a star representing completion of the society's goals of scholarship, leadership, and service.

SFSC's chapter, known as the Tau Epsilon Chapter, received recognition for its scholarly work on the conference's annual theme: "How the World Works." The students from Nicholas' seminar crafted "Global Pen Pal Projects." They researched Senegalese family life and made contact with university students from the Universite Assane Seck, in Ziguinchor, Senegal, with a view toward learning about family life in a distant culture.

"The research and collaboration the students completed aligned perfectly with one PTK's themes of individualism and collectivism," Nicholas said. "Their work was certainly instrumental in the chapter's selection for the award."

Avon Park artists' group provides creative outlet

Gourd artistry is TAG's new offering

By JAYDEE GRICE

INTERNS

AVON PARK — The Artists' Group is tucked into a quaint studio space inside of the Hotel Jacaranda in Avon Park. There, the walls are covered in art, and huge windows take the place of a front wall, which allow plenty of natural light to filter inside.

It's the home of The Artists' Group, better known as TAG, "We've been here over eight years now," said Betty McCarthy, ceramics instructor who helped to bring TAG together.

The Hotel Jacaranda is owned and run by South Florida State College. Catherine Cornelius, former president of the college, more or less got the hotel started, McCarthy said, but the college couldn't rent the room TAG uses because it doesn't have a front door. Now, it has become a gallery and studio for artists.

The walls are lined with various artwork, from paintings to artistic gourds, and courses are held around tables in the center of the room. TAG offers five different classes: water color painting, acrylic painting, ceramics, oil painting and gourd artistry. The courses all range in time and pricing.

Their shortest class, water color painting, is two weeks and costs \$65. Their longest class is ceramics, which lasts for six weeks and costs \$135.

Nancy Adams teaches the oil painting class, which ended March 3.

"We're painting the St. Augustine lighthouse," Adams said. During the four-week-long course, students spent time painting portions of the lighthouse.

"We worked on the sky last week, and this week were going to try do detailed foliage," Adams said recently. The last class will focus on putting details on the



Marjorie Meyer tries to paint as close to the lighthouse as possible by turning the canvas. Joy Tegels takes a moment to look at her canvas.

lighthouse. "That's more meticulous, so we wanted to first cover the canvases," she said.

Adams goes step by step with her students for the four weeks of painting, while also letting them explore their own ideas. "I try to teach them how to develop more in painting, not just copy a photograph," she said.

TAG accept beginners and advanced art students, and Adams' students reflect that.

Joy Tegels is a more experienced painter. Marjorie Meyer is picking the hobby back up. "Marjorie is getting back into it, she's a little more in the beginner level, but she's excellent," said Adams.

Tegels started painting when she retired in 2002. "When I was in school, we never had art teachers, but I loved art," said Tegels, who enjoyed doing art projects as a teen. "When I got out of high school, we were expected to get married and have kids. That generation, it's what you are expected to do, so that's what we did."

Upon retiring, she needed something to fill her time, so she

went back to painting.

Meyer took up painting when she was younger, but found it hard to keep up with the hobby alongside her responsibility as a mother.

By the end of Adams' course, Meyer, Tegels and other students will have a finished oil painting of a lighthouse beach scene. The oil painting classes all last four weeks and cost \$85.

Oil painting isn't the only class students are enjoying. Adams said the watercolor and ceramics classes are full almost all the time.

While those are the most popular classes, for artists looking to try something new, TAG also offers gourd artistry. A gourd artist joined the group in March 2016 and is working to build up her class size.

The Artists' Group tends to appeal to retirees or near retirees, Adams said, and the classes are offered to adults only.

More courses will be available in the next few weeks, and the catalog can be found online at www.southflorida.edu/community/community-education/artists-group. To register, call 863-784-7405.



JAYDEE GRICE/INTERN

Joy Tegels, one member of the oil painting class at The Artists' Group, paints a lighthouse. A water color painting course begins March 9.

SFSC, CareerSource Heartland team up

Giving job seekers an edge

SPECIAL TO
HIGHLANDS NEWS-SUN

SEBRING — With the start of March, students at South Florida State College have access to additional campus-based career services that aim to boost their chances of landing a job.

Students seeking employment assistance from the college's Career Development Center on the SFSC Highlands Campus can now tap into the expertise of career specialists from CareerSource Heartland, the region's workforce development provider.

On Mondays and Wednesdays, a career specialist from CareerSource Heartland works out of the SFSC Career Development Center where they meet one-on-one with students offering them resume writing assistance, tips for job interviewing, and referrals to jobs listed with their expansive database.

The new service came about thanks to a partnership created by SFSC Career Development Center director Colleen Rafatti and CareerSource Heartland's chief executive officer Donna Doubleday.

"CareerSource's career specialists are well-equipped to offer the right mix of services our students need to



COURTESY PHOTO

Karen Stringfield works with SFSC student Kevin Price to get him registered in CareerSource Heartland's job seeker system.

get employed," Rafatti said. "Having them on campus two days each week is a great convenience for SFSC's students who can access their expertise without having to leave campus."

A recent Wednesday saw CareerSource's Karen Stringfield at the SFSC Career Development Center meeting with Kevin Price, a first-year student. Stringfield, who has 17 years of experience working with Heartland job seekers, immediately ushered Price to a computer to register him in CareerSource's job seekers database.

Stringfield will work with Price on formatting his resume, including adding employment-related content, to best suit his career objective.

"One of the key services

we offer is helping students get their resume in good shape and have them upload the document into our Web-based system," Stringfield said. "Employers can then do keyword searches when they're on the hunt for the qualified applicant."

Stringfield said one of the toughest obstacles students are likely to experience in their job searches is lack of experience. But she noted, while many students may not have the precise experience an employer requests, they have transferable skills or similar experience their resumes may not show.

"Since resumes are so critical to a job search, we offer a resume writing workshop in addition to our one-on-one resume reviews with students," Stringfield said. "In today's job market,

students may need to tailor their resumes to different scenarios, so the workshop covers the full range of resume preparation."

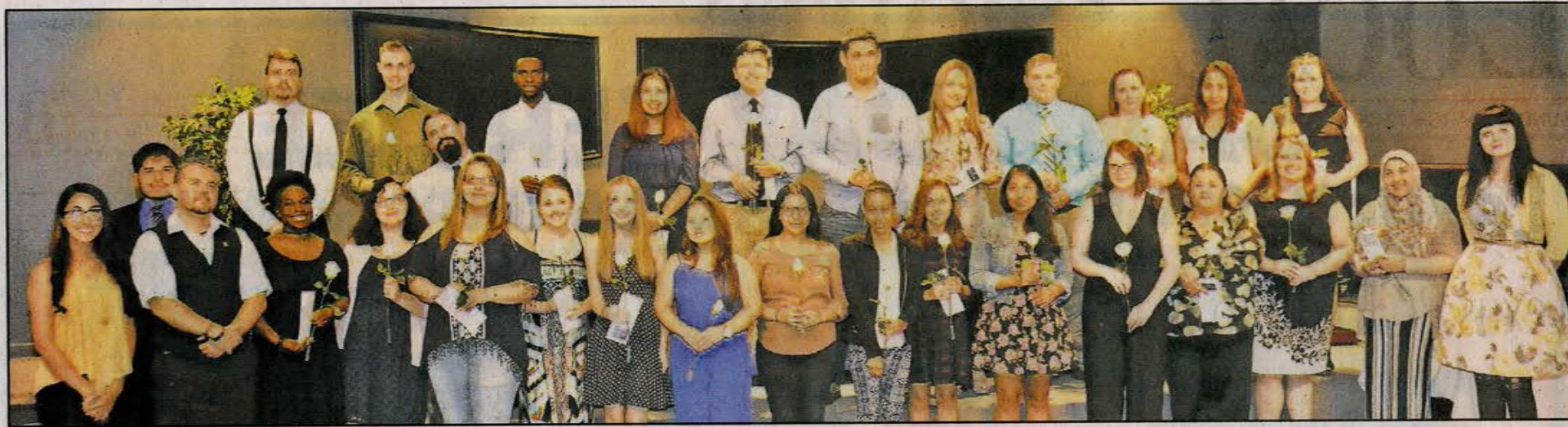
SFSC's Rafatti said she wants to see more students make use of the Career Development Center. "Some of our graduates think picking up their degrees is an instant ticket to a job," she said. "Often they embark on a job search lacking some key skills, like how to best handle a job interview, that's holding them back from scoring the job they want."

Stringfield said SFSC students often have one advantage when entering the job market: They have the training employers want.

"Many employers want applicants who are already trained and job ready," Stringfield said. SFSC graduates students from a number of programs with occupational certificates or who have professional certifications employers seek in applicants, she said.

Students without an occupational certificate or certification shouldn't feel discouraged, Stringfield said.

"I tell folks we do have lots of job seekers," Stringfield said. "But I also say there are lots of job posted with us too."



COURTESY PHOTO

Inductees into South Florida State College's Phi Theta Kappa honor society gather after the evening ceremony. SFSC inducted 67 students into the honor society March 4.

SFSC scholars inducted into honor society

SPECIAL TO THE HIGHLANDS
NEWS-SUN

AVON PARK — On March 4, South Florida State College inducted 67 students into its Tau Epsilon chapter of the Phi Theta Kappa honor society in an evening ceremony.

The honor society recognizes distinguished academic achievement by students in two-year academic programs.

Joan Davies, an SFSC speech and communication

instructor, served as the guest speaker.

"This induction ceremony is a big deal for all of you," Davies said. "I know because I myself once sat where you're sitting now for my own induction."

Then, taking a quotation from Martin Luther King as the theme of her remarks, Davies encouraged the inductees to dwell upon an important trait, she said, was essential to the scholarly life: character.

"Anyone can take

a college course," Davies said. "But it takes commitment, it takes engagement, it takes attentiveness, it takes character to be a scholar."

As the ceremony drew to a close, the inductees stepped forward 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.

Inductees include Ray Aguilar Espidol, Sarah Alfaro, Ahlam Alqabsi, Eric Andrews, Kaylin Baker, Magali Barcenas, Michaela Beard, Allison Beck, Sarah Bonds, Christine Boone, Dolores Breedlove, Hunter Browning, Eliany Cabrera, Alina Cancel, Anabel Cardenas, Esteban Carranza,

Jesenia Cortes, Irving Cruz, Mathew Daniel, Taylor Day, Jackeline Dela Cruz, Ofelia Diaz Brito, Felise Ehrenkauffer, Anna Erikson, Kellie Farmer, Valerie Fleegeer, Emily Flores, Wilney Francois, Roger Frazier III, Caleah Gammage, Jamicia Gilmore, Maria Gonzalez, Malik Graham, Janet Guido, Kayli Harrison, Danielle Hart, Francis Hendry, Brittany Hobart, Stacy Hobby, Kylee Huylebroeck, Jhana Leighton, Jason James, Ethan Lawrence,

Samantha Lenz, Harry Lindsay, Samantha Lusby, Maribel Marcial, Kristina Mendoza, George Gomez Perez, Rosario Piedad-Camacho, Denise Porter, Aubrey Rigney, Diana Rivera, Bryan Robbins, Yesenia Santos, James Sheridan, Frances Spradley, Danny Sustaita, Kailey Swaine, Genesis Torres, Hannah Tucker, Pagou Vue, Audra Weeks, Alyssa Whittington, Kelly Yarbrough, Katherine Yeager, and Erika Weaver-Coleman.

Friendly rivalries are high point of College Week



COURTESY PHOTOS

South Florida State College's annual College Week kicked off on March 6 with eight teams competing in the three-legged race.

SPECIAL TO
HIGHLANDS NEWS-SUN

AVON PARK — Each spring, South Florida State College organizes College Week, a series of competitive events for teams comprised of students, staff, and faculty. Through this annual tradition, friendly rivalry breaks down barriers between students and creates opportunities for friendships to form. For many SFSC students and staff alike, College Week is the highlight of spring term.

The 2017 College Week games were played March 6-9 at the SFSC Highlands Campus. Eight teams were pitted against each other in an egg toss, three-legged race, dodge ball, tug-of-war, an obstacle course, and the popular belly flop contest in the SFSC pool.

On Monday, Registered Nerds won the three-legged race, while Vicious and Delicious took first in the egg toss. Tuesday's results were split between the Untouchables, which won the tug-of-war competition, and the

Squad, which dominated the belly flop contest. The Squad also won Wednesday's dodge ball games and tied with The Untouchables in Thursday's obstacle course challenge.

When four days' worth of scores were tallied, the Squad team finished first in three of the six events and was the overall winner with 135 points. Equon's Cousins was second with 115 points, and The Untouchables claimed third with 105 points.

SFSC MOFAC Hosts Artist's Talk

The Museum of Florida Art and Culture at South Florida State College will host a talk by artist, poet and scholar Melanie Hubbard, Thursday, March. 30, 1:30 to 2:30 p.m., on the SFSC Highlands Campus, Avon Park.

Titled "Texts and Textures: Erasure Poetry by Melanie Hubbard," the free event will feature Melanie Hubbard, whose work is on display at MOFAC. The talk will be held in the MOFAC gallery.

MOFAC is exhibiting a collection of Hubbard's art based on a 1924 book dealing with child rearing. Using watercolors, Hubbard paints atop enlarged images replicating pages from the book to effect what she says is an "erasure" of the antiquated advice given to mothers.

Hubbard won the 2011 Book Award in Poetry from Subito Press for her collection of poems "We Have with Us Your Sky." Her reviews, scholarly articles and essays have appeared in a variety of periodicals. She has taught at New College of Florida, Eckerd College, and University of Tampa. She received a doctorate in literature from Columbia University and is writing a book on Emily Dickinson's poetics.

Megan Stepe, MOFAC's curator, noted Hubbard's talk falls on the last day her works are on display. Stepe said museum visitors can also take in the current exhibition, "The 20th Century Seminole Experience: Paintings from the Florida Indian Tribes Series," that closes on March 30.

The talk is one of a series of



COURTESY IMAGE

One of Melanie Hubbard's erasure poetry paintings on display in the Museum of Florida Art and Culture.

MOFAC's "ThirdThursday" public discussions that shine a spotlight on current exhibitions and works from the museum's collection.

MOFAC is located in the Wildstein Center at SFSC, 600 W. College Dr., Avon Park. The museum is open to the public on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, 12:30 to 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 programs or to request a museum tour, contact Stepe at 863-784-7240, or email stepem@southflorida.edu. Visit the MOFAC website at mofac.org.

SFSC Museum Hosts Pygmy Fringe Tree Wildflower Festival

On March 9, visitors in search of a pygmy fringe tree in bloom at South Florida State College's Pygmy Fringe Tree Wildflower Festival got their wish.

The rare plant was in full bloom, showing off its flowers to dozens who turned out for the annual festival put on by the SFSC Museum of Florida Art and Culture (MOFAC) on the college's Highlands Campus in Avon Park.

"Here is one of the few places on the planet where you can see the pygmy fringe tree," said Dustin Angell, an education coordinator with Archbold Biological Station. He was standing in front of the rare shrub just a few feet back from a winding path of white sand known as SFSC's Wildflower Wayside Shrine Trail, which runs parallel to College Drive.

"There are other pygmy fringe trees near Bok Tower Gardens in Polk County, and a few more in Highlands, but that's about it," Angell told a group of 15 people he led on a walk through the trail. The group was just one of several who came out for the festival, now in its fourth year.

Known also as *Chionanthus pygmaeus*, the now rare flowering shrub grows between three and six feet tall. The shrub garnered the affection of wildflower enthusiasts for its stunning flowers that appear in early spring. The federal

government declared it endangered in 1987.

The festival kicked off with music by Florida Seminole songwriter Rita Youngman, who sang songs telling the lore of her tribe. Keeping the wildflower hunters entertained during musical interludes, Florida folklorist Carol Mahler, recounted oral traditions explaining, for example, how possums have such little hair on their tails.

Members of the Audubon Society and the Ridge Rangers were be on hand to answer questions from the public about the region's natural habitat. Visitors walking along the path found artists from the Lake Placid Art League capturing the flowers in their plein air, or open air, painting.

"Our Wayside Shrine Trail is one of the few venues where the public can encounter this rare and extraordinary shrub," said Megan Stepe, MOFAC's curator, who organized this year's festival. She noted the timing was perfect this year, with the pygmy fringe tree in full bloom for the visitors. Last year, only one tree, which was inaccessible to the public, flowered during the festival.

The trail was the brainchild of MOFAC's former curator, Mollie Doctrow, noted for her award-winning woodcuts of natural habitats. She conceived the trail based on her own exploration of nature. The trail opened in 2011.

In addition to the pygmy fringe tree, visitors can glimpse a range of native plants flowering along the trail: the big flag pawpaw, sky-blue lupine, and another endangered species, the scrub St. John's Wort.

Visitors to the trail can leave behind their impressions of the views in notebooks found in wooden shrine boxes sitting atop poles along the path. The boxes, designed by Doctrow, contain information that showcases the shrubs and wildflowers. Relief images of the trail's wildflowers adorn the side of each box, allowing visitors to make a rubbing on paper as a memento of their visit.

A walk through the trail gives visitors a chance to see the land, known as the Lake Wales Ridge, as it existed for centuries. The ridge, an ancient beach and sand dune system formed 1-3 million years ago, has been home to flora that has struggled to survive against development.

The trail is open to the public during regular college hours. Visitors should look for Entrance 5 along College Drive. A sign across the roadway marks the point where the trail begins.

For more information on the Wayside Shrine Trail, contact Stepe at 863-784-7240 or stepem@southflorida.edu, or visit the website at mofac.org/wayside.



COURTESY PHOTOS

A festival attendee standing by a shrine box on the Wayside Shrine Trail.



Carol Mahler entertains festival goers with folklore tales.

SFSC sees big enrollment jump

By **MARC VALERO**
STAFF WRITER

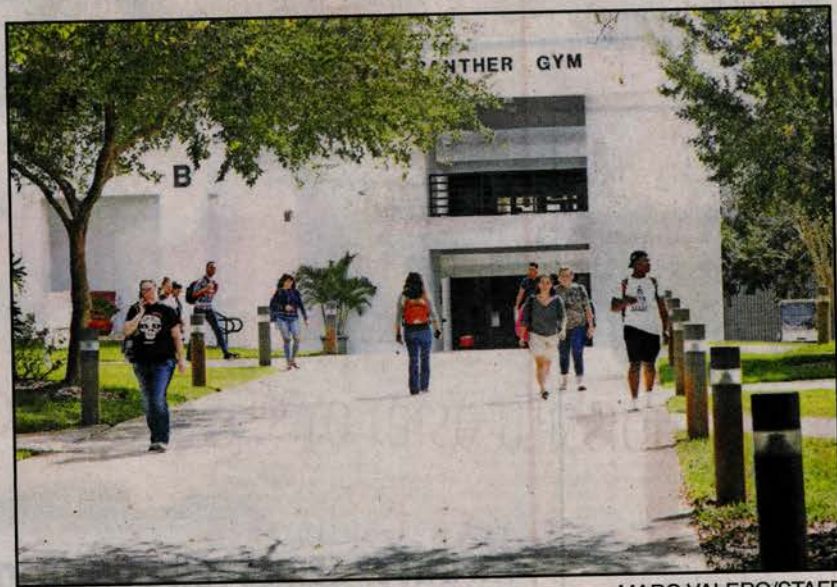
AVON PARK — Bucking the statewide downward trend, South Florida State College's 5.2 percent spring term enrollment boost is its largest increase in a decade.

It has been about 10 years since the college has had such a "significant" enrollment increase, said Glenn Little, vice president of administrative services.

The increase is spread across the college's three campuses and among its program offerings, he noted. The vocational programs with associate in science degrees seem to be doing the best overall, but all of the college's programs are faring well, he said.

Among the state's 28 state colleges, only about two or three others have had significant enrollment increases while the state college system as a whole is down about 1.5 percent in the spring term.

Little attributed the increase to a renewed effort by the enrollment management committee



MARC VALERO/STAFF

South Florida State College was one of only three colleges, among Florida's 28 state colleges, to have a significant enrollment increase in the spring term.

task force led by Vice President for Academic Affairs and Student Services Sidney Valentine.

The group looks into the educational needs of the students and the community, and then responds to those needs such as

expanding the evening class offerings and opening more sections of a class, Little said.

The task force consists of about 20 people who represent different

ENROLLMENT

FROM PAGE 1

areas of the college.

Valentine said they meet weekly to discuss current and upcoming enrollment concerns.

Their main goal is to ensure that students not only enroll at SFSC but are successful through graduation and job placement, he said.

"To accomplish this, we have begun to increase tracking of students' progression from orientation to registration for classes, and on to success in each semester, culminating in job placement and graduation," Valentine said.

To increase accessibility, the college has increased night classes and is implementing night

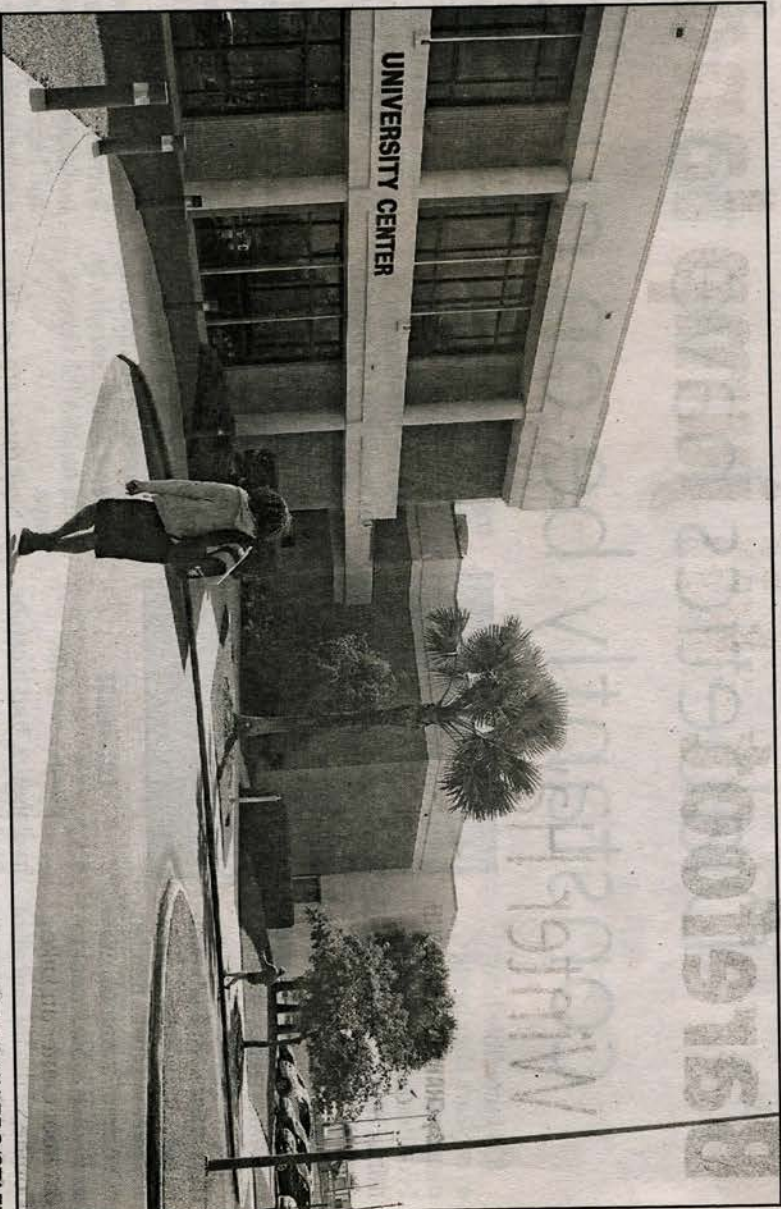
programs to include the baccalaureate degrees in nursing and elementary education as well as Air Conditioning Certification, he noted.

Increasing enrollment and retaining students is a positive for the college, Little said.

The college's annual enrollment is equivalent to about 2,300 full-time students.

Little recommends students register as early as possible for each term so they can get the classes they need.

"It also helps us determine whether or not we need to open up a new section," he said. If the college knows ahead time about enrollment levels, an adjunct faculty member can be recruited and a new section of a course can be added, he said.



South Florida State College's enrollment increased 5.2 percent in the spring term

MARC VALERO/STAFF

Ortiz's upbringing inspiration for SFSC students

By LEX MENZ

ARCADIAN ASSISTANT EDITOR

Minerva Ortiz started life without much passion for education. In fact, she dropped out of high school during her second semester of 11th grade.



ORTIZ

Now, she is the case manager for the Florida Farmworker Jobs and Education Program at South Florida State College – DeSoto Campus and works tirelessly every day to make sure DeSoto County residents who have rocky educational starts like hers get their associate's degree and find a career path they love.

Ortiz's parents moved from Mexico to Texas in the 1970s. Her father had an education level of a third-grade student; her mother had the education level of a sixth-grade student. Her parents believed in the merits of working hard, not studying hard. When Ortiz wanted to drop out of her high school, her parents had no qualms about it as long as Ortiz immediately got a job.

"Education wasn't really that important for them," Ortiz said.

Ortiz wishes someone had stepped up and told her, "Hey, you're going to need this later."

In 1991, Ortiz moved to Arcadia. When she lost her job due to cut backs

as a clerical worker, Ortiz realized that without a high school diploma she did not have any options.

"Four years of experience in clerical isn't going to get you the job you need," Ortiz said.

Raising two children alone, Ortiz thought she did not have time to go back to school to get her diploma. However, her children encouraged her to pursue her education.

"I was doing it for them. Yeah, I needed it, and they were the ones that motivated me," Ortiz said.

She applied to SFSC but wasn't feeling motivated about attending until she saw her entry testing scores. She had made high marks in all subjects.

At the same time, she applied for the case manager position for the Farmworker Career Development Program at the college. The program is available to DeSoto County residents ages 16 and up and who are farm workers themselves or who are dependent on a farmer. It provides counseling, English-speaking classes, training in basic skills, financial aid and more.

Even though the job asked for a minimum of an associate's degree, Ortiz applied. When she got the interview, she showed her future employers her test scores and persuaded them that she was the perfect fit for the job. Sixteen years later, she still loves her work there, and she uses her story to encourage her

students who are struggling.

As she started work for the Farmworker Career Development program, which meant working out of her car since she had no office, Ortiz also began taking college classes.

"I was really scared to take a college course," Ortiz said.

It was difficult. Her father had a stroke. She was working 40 hours a week. She was caring for two children.

After a semester, Ortiz stopped taking classes for awhile. However, her students inspired her to keep going, and she started up again a few years later. Of course, life continued on. Her first grandchild was born, her father was put on dialysis, and she was also putting together a party planning business during the week-ends. She planned a party nearly every weekend.

"I did wait five years and then go back to school. After graduating, I thought, 'I'll go straight into my bachelor's degree, but life happens,'" Ortiz said with a knowing smile.

Helping the next generation

Ortiz is still just as busy today with six grandchildren and her party planning business in full swing. Still, she cannot tear herself away from her work at SFSC.

"I don't want to leave this because this is so rewarding," Ortiz said.

At first, her students are usually

reluctant about going to school. Then, as they begin mapping out their educational pathway and then their future career, Ortiz sees their excitement come out. She has former students come back and visit her on a regular basis, and they even encourage and recommend other people they know for the program.

Ortiz also tries to educate the parents because of her parents' priorities when she was growing up.

"This sacrifice that (the students) are making is going to be worth it. We're trying to break the cycle," Ortiz said. "I just want them to continue because I want them to get where they need to go."

In her downtime, Ortiz hangs out with her grandchildren. Her oldest, who is 7 years old, helps her plan parties. Ortiz also has a great love for Arcadia. She said when she first arrived from Texas, "it was a shock" because there were no lakes, rivers or streams, just tumbleweeds and dry spaces.

"So when you move to Florida, it is paradise. And when I go back (to visit), it's like how did I ever live here? There's a certain smell in the air that I never noticed before. When I go back, it stinks, it's ugly, it's dry," Ortiz said. "I don't think I'll ever (move) back at all. I love it here. This is perfect for me."

As for her bachelor's degree? Ortiz has not achieved it yet, but it could always happen.

"I keep saying I'm going to go back," Ortiz said.

Phi Beta Lambda State Leadership Conference

SFSC business students place in statewide competition

SPECIAL TO
HIGHLANDS NEWS-SUN

AVON PARK — While many South Florida State College students used spring break to relax, seven SFSC students traveled to Orlando to compete in the 2017 Phi Beta Lambda (PBL) State Leadership Conference.

The SFSC students were members of the college's chapter of PBL, the premier postsecondary student business organization in the United States.

During the course of three days, the SFSC students joined hundreds of students from colleges and universities from

“This is the fifth year in a row our students have placed so well among their peers, thus qualifying for the national competition,”

Adam Martin, professor of Business Administration

around the state vying to place in business studies-related competitions. Membership in SFSC's PBL chapter is open to students in its Bachelor of Applied Science in Supervision and Management (BAS-SM) program.

Of the seven SFSC students who attended the conference, these six placed among the

top five in the following events:

Dalal Zaban, first place in impromptu speaking; the team of Amanda Carnahan, Ashley Stanton, and Amber Pacheco, third place in marketing analysis and decision making; the team of Stephen Wynn and Joseph Mangrum,

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COURTESY PHOTO

Joseph Mangrum, from left, Amber Pacheco, Caitlin Conrad, Amanda Carnahan, Ashley Stanton, Stephen Wynn, and Adam Martin at the 2017 Phi Beta Lambda (PBL) State Leadership Conference in Orlando.

BUSINESS

FROM PAGE 1

fourth place in management analysis and decision making; Stephen Wynn, fourth place in management concepts.

Zaban has also qualified to represent Florida at the PBL National Leadership Conference in June, where she will compete in impromptu speaking.

"This is the fifth year in a row our students have placed so well among their peers, thus qualifying for the national competition," said Adam Martin, professor of Business Administration, who advises SFSC's PBL chapter. "This year's results are a testament to the hard work and dedication of our



COURTESY PHOTO

Dalal Zaban, left, stands with Adam Martin, holding a plaque honoring her first place finish in impromptu speaking

students and to our amazing faculty."

SFSC host STEM study for high schoolers

By **MANUEL CORTAZAL**

SOUTH FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE

The usual quiet of Saturday on the Highlands Campus of South Florida State College was broken March 25, when nearly 100 high school juniors and seniors from DeSoto, Hardee, Highlands, Glades and Okeechobee counties descended on the college for a day of intensive learning dubbed STEM Scholars Day.

The students took part in a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) exploration program offered through the Heartland Educational Consortium and SFSC.

The students assembled in the SFSC University Center Auditorium for a welcome talk by Dr. Thomas C. Leitzel, SFSC president, and Paul Blackman, Highlands County's sheriff.

"This marks the sixth year of our partnership with SFSC offering STEM learning adventures to our students," said Lisa Shin of HEC and a coordinator of the STEM Scholars program. "For a day, the students immerse themselves in science- and technology-related subjects presented by SFSC faculty in a manner designed to dispel the notion these subjects are dry or dull."

Students got hands-on training in the science of forensic investigations from deputies of the Highlands County Sheriff's Crime Scene Unit. Students learned what makes fingerprints unique, how to cast shoe impressions and saw demonstrations of scientific equipment used in the



PHOTOS PROVIDED

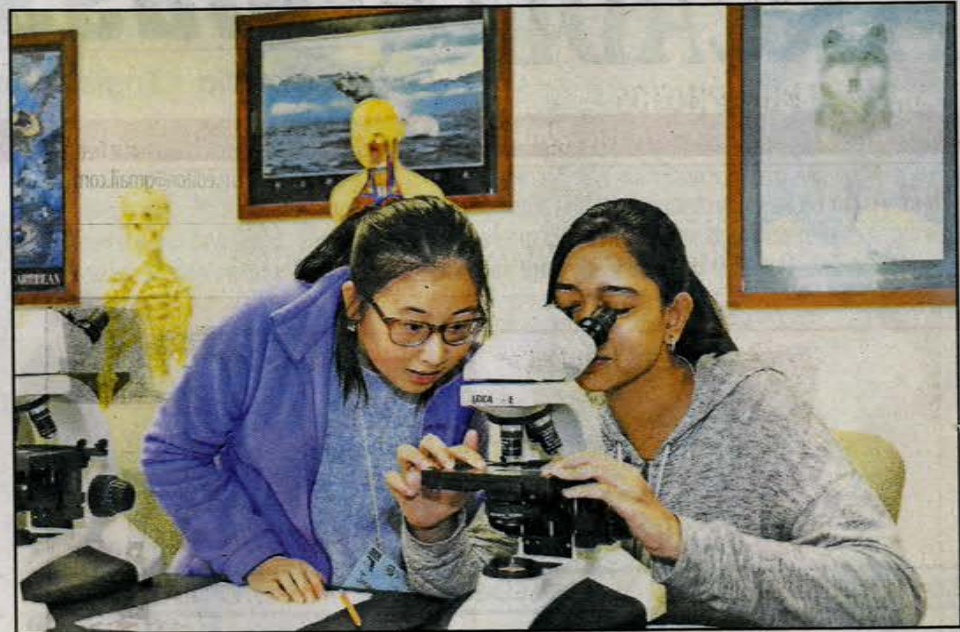
A student works through an experiment in an SFSC lab on STEM Scholars Day.

lab and at a crime scene.

Students shuffled between a series of real-world biology lessons taught by SFSC science faculty. Huddled around microscopes, the high schoolers learned how to view the presence of bacteria on surfaces, examine the biodiversity of surface water, and parse the sequencing of DNA. They also worked through an intense lesson in the dynamics of computer programming.

In SFSC's nursing simulation labs, the students got hands-on training from the college's student nurses in medical equipment used in patient care, practicing on high-tech mannequins that replicate actual patient-caregiver interactions.

The day wasn't only about STEM education. HEC and SFSC aimed to prod the students into career exploration, hoping the day's regimen of varied mini-classes would spur them on to STEM degree programs after high school.



Two STEM Scholars Day students use a microscope to examine the biodiversity of surface water.

"STEM education fosters critical thinking, enhances science literacy, and nurtures the next generation of innovators," said Lynn MacNeill, the interim dean of SFSC's Division of Arts and Sciences. "Employers seek out innovators because they drive development of new products, technologies and services."

John Varady, another coordinator of HEC's STEM Scholars program noted, "According to the Department of Commerce, STEM occupations have grown at double the rate of other occupations. The STEM Scholars program offers a variety of experiences that will help students make well-informed decisions about academic preparation for the

STEM-related careers of the future."

Varady pointed out to the students that STEM careers are not restricted to hospitals, labs and technology companies, they can also be found in education. He noted there is a shortage of K-12 teachers ready to teach STEM courses.

"You can come right to SFSC and complete its Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education program," Varady said. "We also need folks who are ready to teach the STEM classes of tomorrow."

HEC is a cooperative organized by the region's school districts that provides curriculum and training support to member schools and their instructors.

SFSC fall registration deadline approaching

By **MANUAL CORTAZAL**

South Florida State College has opened registration for its fall academic term. The first day of classes of the fall term is Aug. 18.

Fall term registration for all students begins April 3. Current students can register and pay for classes through the college portal, Panther Central. Classes for the summer term begin May 5 and students can register for summer term classes through May 8. The summer

term ends July 31.

New students can apply for admission to the college by clicking the "Apply Now" button on the top of SFSC's home page at: www.southflorida.edu. Students should apply for admission before the beginning of the term so that they're ready to start classes on time.

Students can register in person for the fall term on the SFSC Highlands Campus in Avon Park by visiting the Advising and Counseling Center in

Building B., 8 a.m.- 6 p.m., Monday through Thursday, and 8 a.m.- 5 p.m., Fridays. Students can also register at these SFSC locations: Hardee Campus in Bowling Green, the Lake Placid Center or the DeSoto Campus in Arcadia.

Financial aid is available to those who are qualified. The priority deadline for SFSC Foundation scholarships is June 15 for the fall term.

Students who plan to apply for financial aid should complete the Free Application for Federal Student

Aid (FAFSA) as soon as possible. The application is online at www.fafsa.ed.gov. For more information about financial assistance and scholarships, contact the SFSC Financial Aid Office at 784-7134.

For further information about registration, call 453-6661 (Highlands Campus), 773-3081 (Hardee Campus), 993-1757 (DeSoto Campus) or 465-3003 (Lake Placid Center). For information about SFSC and its programs, visit www.southflorida.edu.

Highlands County: Art and cultural capital of Florida's Heartland

Highlands County is one of the few remaining pieces of Old Florida, and is justifiably famous for its natural beauty and superb outdoor recreational activities, not to mention one of the biggest sports car races in the world.

These things attract thousands of tourists and are a big plus for our seasonal and permanent residents.

We also have a thriving arts scene and unique museums, which add immense value to our community as both a tourist destination and a great place to live.

The Avon Park Library is within walking distance of two museums.



LIBRARY LINES

Mary Beth Isaacson

The Avon Park Depot Museum has many interesting artifacts about the town's history, while the Peter Powell Roberts Museum of Art is devoted to the works of its namesake, a Florida Master Artist who specialized in Central

Florida landscapes. These beautiful paintings are one of our county's treasures, and our museum has the largest Roberts collection in the world. Avon Park also possesses The Artists' Group at the Jacaranda Hotel, the Museum of Florida Art and Culture and the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts, both of which are on the South Florida State College campus.

Arts and culture attractions in Sebring include the Highlands Museum of the Arts and the Military Sea Services Museum, which is the only museum in the entire country that honors

the Sea Services: the Navy, the Marine Corps, and the Coast Guard. There's also the Civilian Conservation Corps Museum at Highlands Hammock State Park.

The CCC played a huge role in developing and conserving natural resources, not to mention providing much-needed employment to thousands of people during the Great Depression, and this is the only museum in Florida devoted to the program.

If you have any acting or singing skills, or if you're interested in theatre, the Highlands Little Theatre is always looking for volunteers and

performers. Their next production, Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, starts on March 31.

In 2013, Lake Placid was voted the "Most Interesting Town in America" by Reader's Digest. Among the town's most famous attractions are its 47 murals, which celebrate its history, culture, and natural beauty. Lake Placid is perhaps also the funniest place in Florida, thanks to the American Clown Museum and School. The museum contains over 700 pieces of clown memorabilia, including paintings by Red Skelton, a life-size carousel horse,

and original circus posters. Other art organizations in LP include the Caladium Arts & Crafts Cooperative and the Lake Placid Art League, both of which offer art classes.

Highlands County may be best known for the Twelve Hours of Sebring, but we also excel in unique cultural attractions, which draw visitors from all over the world. They also provide education, entertainment, and enrichment for local residents. Whether you're attending a play, viewing or creating art, or borrowing books from the library, there's always something interesting in Highlands County.



Courtesy photo/Neil Simpson

Yvette Miller, from left, Kathy Fuss, Mary Ellen Charko and Jeannette Davidson enjoy a game of Mah Jongg at Sun 'N Lake during the 2017 games.



Judy Hurst, from left, John Sproule, Neil Knutson and Judy Sproule play a hand at the 2017 Heartland Games Euchre tournament.



Eileen Gossens, from left, Pat Reich and Wilma Pilkington are engrossed in their cards at the 2017 Heartland Games Bridge tournament.

Non-athletic events to return to Heartland Games For Active Adults

By NEIL SIMPSON

SPECIAL TO HIGHLANDS SUN

SEBRING — The inclusion of non-athletic events in the Heartland Games For Active Adults has proven to be quite a success this season. In 2016, South Florida State College introduced Bridge and Euchre. The popularity of those two events led to the addition of Mah Jongg for the 2017 Heartland Games.

More than 100 competitors took part in these three events which rely on mental, rather than physical fitness. The enthusiastic response to the expansion of the Games For Active Adults to appeal to an even wider audience of those 50 years of age and over has guaranteed their inclusion for the foreseeable future.

Sebring's Tanglewood

Community has already agreed to once again host all three of the events in 2018. Bridge players will be welcomed to the Tanglewood clubhouse by convener Pat Reich on Friday, Feb. 2. Carl Mys will coordinate the Euchre tournament on Thursday, Feb. 8. Sandy Haka will be the hostess for the Mah Jongg tournament which, due to its first year success, will move to a bigger venue in the Tanglewood clubhouse on Friday, Feb. 16.

All three events will be held earlier than in the 2017 Heartland Games For Active Adults. For that reason, information will be shared widely in the fall so that prospective competitors will be able to submit their registration forms before Christmas or early in January to ensure a

spot in the games of their choice.

Watch the Highlands Sun and Highlands News-Sun this fall for more information

about these and other events.

Check the website at www.southflorida.edu/heartlandgames for full details.

Point of Grace trio to perform at SFSC

By **MARC VALERO**
STAFF WRITER

AVON PARK — The female vocal trio, Point of Grace, will showcase its spirited harmonies on many of its inspirational songs Thursday in the Alan Jay Wildstein Theatre for the Performing Arts at South Florida State College.

The contemporary Christian music trio is celebrating 25 years of performing, recording and winning awards, such as 13 Dove Awards from the Gospel Music Association.

Point of Grace is based in Tennessee with members Shelley Breen, Leigh Cappillino and Denise Jones.

Highlands News-Sun spoke with Jones by phone Monday as the trio was prepping for an appearance Tuesday at the Grand Ole Opry.

Point of Grace has been on the Opry about 50 times, Jones said. "We are just grateful for that opportunity to be on the stage with the incredible musicians," she said.

Country music and the Grand Ole Opry actually started with a faith-based background because the Ryman Auditorium was once a church, she noted.

"Our music has to do with family and faith and our walk with the Lord and so it has been a sweet place to go and sing our music to people who might not necessarily be listening to



Courtesy photo

The contemporary Christian female vocal trio Point of Grace will be performing Thursday in the Alan Jay Wildstein Theatre for the Performing Arts at South Florida State College. From left: Shelly Breen, Leigh Cappillino and Denise Jones.

contemporary Christian radio stations all the time, but who are still rooted in their faith," Jones said.

Point of Grace has released 13 albums and garnered 27 number one songs.

The group's latest album, *Directions Home* from 2015, is mostly cover tunes.

"We had never done that before in our career so we thought it might be fun to take some songs that inspire us or moved us for different reasons throughout the years and put a 'Point of Grace' spin on them," Jones said. That includes adding extra harmonies.

When picking material to record and perform, Jones looks for songs that carry an eternal value for her.

"Is it going to encourage me to walk differently that day or encourage me as I

am going through a hard time?" she asked. "When people are driving down the road, taking their kids to school or going to work, will they hear a song that might make them smile or make them be thankful that day or make them realize they are not walking alone?"

Point of Grace will be performing at 7 p.m., Thursday in the Alan Jay Wildstein Theatre for the Performing Arts.

Tickets are available for this Artist Series performance starting at \$32.

For more information and to purchase tickets go online: www.sfscarts.org. To contact the box office, call 863-784-7178.

The box office is open 11:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m., Monday through Friday and one hour before show time.

The Hillbenders to perform 'Tommy: A Bluegrass Opry'

By **KIM LEATHERMAN**
CORRESPONDENT

AVON PARK — The Hillbenders will perform The Who's classic rock opera, "Tommy" at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts at South Florida State College on Thursday, April 6 at 7 p.m. The Hillbenders have adapted the classic and call it "Tommy: A Bluegrass Opry."

"It's a rock and roll show with bluegrass instruments," said guitarist Jim Rea.

Sound like an oxymoron? Not according to Rea; not according to the band's fans and not according to the original composer, The Who's Pete Townshend. Townshend gave the opry a big thumbs up when he invited the Hillbenders to a concert in Nashville and met with the five band members.

"It's Bluegrass meets Rock and Roll," Townshend said at the time.

"Tommy: A Bluegrass Opry" was conceived by musician and producer, Louis Jay Meyers decades ago and finally found the

Hillbenders to be worthy of it.

"When Meyers approached us, we knew it was something special," said Rea. "He is a great visionary."

Patrons to the concert will hear about a half hour of original songs that are mostly made of three- and four-part harmonies. The members share the lead vocal work on their songs.

"We are five people up there and we all have our own thing going," said Rea. "We have been getting good feedback with that."

Rea said the show will not be an outdated Bluegrass experience. "We are not going to be in overalls playing your grandpa's Bluegrass," Rea joked. "We keep it light despite some serious content. You won't leave

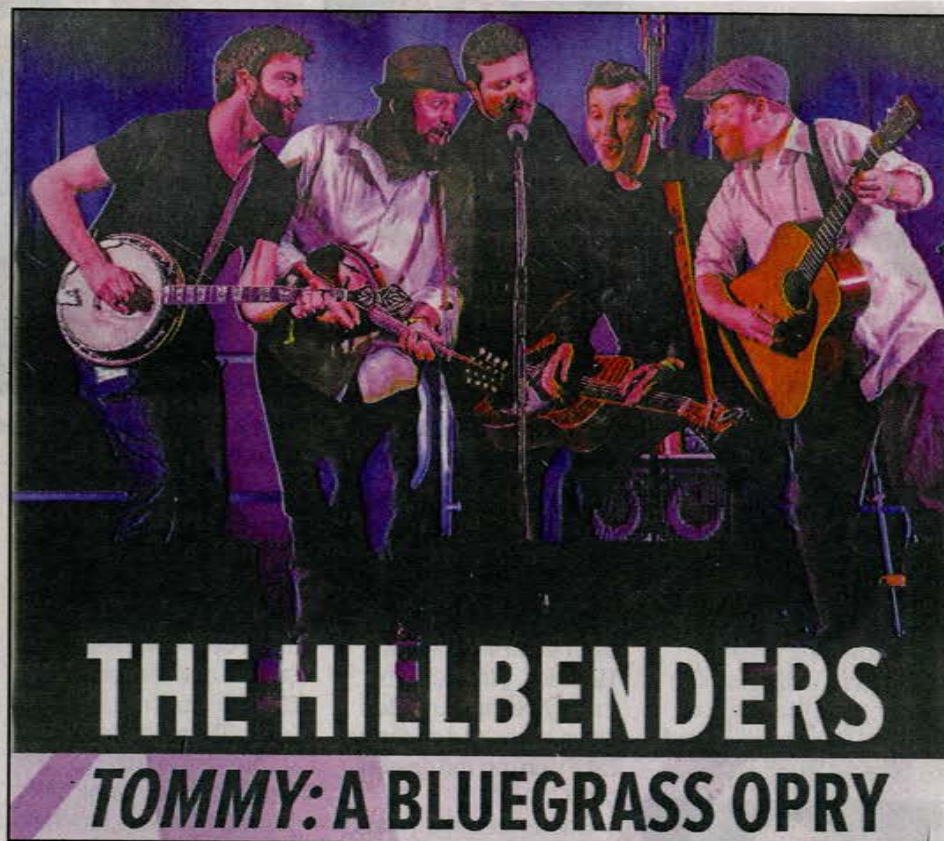
Courtesy photo

Right: The Hillbenders, a five-member bluegrass band out of Springfield, Missouri, will perform at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts at South Florida State College in Avon Park at 7 p.m. on Thursday, April 6.

depressed."

The band's track record of touring with "Tommy" is promising with great reviews from fans, converts and industry giants touting their fondness of the show.

Tickets and more information and be found at www.alanjay.com/wildstein-center-for-the-performing-arts.htm. For more information on the Hillbenders go to their Facebook page or Hillbenders.com



Panthers set for conference

SFSC has 3-game winning streak heading into tonight's Suncoast opener

HIGHLANDS NEWS-SUN
SPORTS STAFF

The South Florida State College Panthers baseball team is heating up at the right time, as they begin Suncoast Conference play tonight at State College of Florida. The Panthers have won their last three games to move to 12-9 on the year.

The Panthers began their winning streak on

Saturday with an 8-1 victory over Southeastern University. South Florida got four strong innings from starter Evan Lumbert and Josh Heckman earned the win by throwing four shutout innings.

Pedro Castellano tripled and homered for the Panthers, scoring two runs and driving in three. Franco Camacho drove in a pair of runs and Blaise

Maris had a pair of hits and scored twice.

On Saturday, the Panthers received some more solid pitching in a 5-1 win at Pasco-Hernando. Former Sebring Blue Streak Gerig Blackman earned the win with 2 $\frac{2}{3}$ scoreless innings to improve to 3-1 on the year. Starter Josh Bobrowski allowed one run and pitched into the fifth inning, while Matt

Portis recorded the final three outs.

Quentin Davis had a home run and knocked in a pair of runs, while former Blue Streak Jordan Austin had a two-run base hit in his only plate appearance. Maris continued to swing a hot bat with a 4 for 4 day and Evan Schaffner had three hits in the game.

The pitching wasn't there Monday night



HIGHLANDS NEWS-SUN FILE PHOTO

South Florida's Matt Portis fields a throw to get an out at first base in a game with Santa Fe College.

against Webber University's B team, but the offense got the job done in a 14-13, 10-inning victory.

Tonight's game will be in Bradenton, with the

same two teams meeting on Friday at Panther Field before resuming the series in Bradenton on Saturday.

The Panthers will also be home Sunday and Monday.

Pioneers sweep Panthers



MARK PINSON/Staff

South Florida State College's Alyssa Whittington puts the ball in play during Tuesday's first game against Indian River State College at Panther Field.

Indian River blanks South Florida in softball

By **MARK PINSON**
HIGHLANDS NEWS-SUN

AVON PARK — With one week left before Suncoast Conference games begin, the South Florida State College softball team is looking for its offense to show up.

The Panthers failed to capitalize on a number of scoring opportunities in dropping a doubleheader to Indian River State College by identical scores of 9-0 on Tuesday.

The wins improved the Pioneers to 18-9, while South Florida, which has lost

five games in a row, dropped to 5-13 on the season.

"We have no offense right now," said Panther softball coach Carlos Falla. "We're letting good pitches go by and we're swinging at every bad pitch. We only gave up three hits in the first game, but made several defensive mistakes which led to at least five unearned runs. We need to get this turned around in a hurry because we begin conference play next week."

Indian River came out swinging in the top of the first inning as Savannah Julylia was hit by a pitch, Stefany Collins had an

infield single and a double steal moved the runners into scoring position.

Jaden Kline lined a single to right field to plate Julylia and Collins, and advanced to second base on a throw to home.

Dream Aaron singled to center field to move Kline to third base and Kaley Hinds grounded out to score Kline to give the Pioneers a 3-0 lead.

South Florida went down in order in the bottom of the frame against Indian River right-hander Auria Mounts.

PIONEERS

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The Pioneers tacked on a run in the top of the second inning as Julylia reached on a fielder's choice, stole second base and raced home on a double to right field by Collins to make it 4-0.

South Florida had an excellent chance to get back in the game in the bottom of the inning when the Panthers loaded the bases with two outs.

But Mounts bore down to strike out the next batter to keep South Florida off the scoreboard.

"We're chasing balls out of the zone," Falla said. "We've got to make the right adjustments

and understand what we need to do at the plate, especially with runners in scoring position."

Indian River went back to work in the top of the third inning as Aaron worked a leadoff walk off of South Florida left-hander Evangeline Futch and an infield error put runners at first and second base.

Hinds put down a bunt which was misplayed allowing one run to score. A bunt single scored another run and Julylia stroked a two-run single to left field.

Kline plated another run with an RBI single to give the Pioneers a commanding 9-0 lead.

South Florida had a pair of runners on base with two outs in the

bottom of the inning, but once again Mounts reached back to retire the next batter to end the threat.

Neither team threatened the rest of the game and Indian River cruised to the 9-0 victory.

"We've got to do better with runners in scoring position," said Falla. "We have to score when we get the opportunity and we can't keep chasing pitches out of the strike zone."

The second game was similar to the first with Indian River taking the early lead behind its potent offense. The Pioneer pitchers threw strikes and let their defense make plays behind them in winning the second game by a score of 9-0 to sweep the doubleheader.

MARK PINSON/Staff

Indian River State College's Stefany Collins slides in safely with an RBI double as South Florida shortstop Brianna Schwecke applies a late tag during Tuesday's game.

"We are a better team than what we showed," said Falla. "We just need to swing the bats and score some runs and that will make a big difference. We start conference play next week and it's time for us to start playing like we're capable."

South Florida was back on the diamond on Thursday against Seminole State College. The Panthers are home on Saturday for a doubleheader against Lincolnland Community College (Illinois).



Panthers drop last 2 games South Florida team drops back to .500

HIGHLANDS NEWS-SUN SPORTS STAFF

The South Florida State College Panthers came up on the short end of a 4-1 decision to St. Petersburg College on Monday. St. Petersburg broke open a close game with three runs in the top of the seventh inning to take a 4-0 lead. The Panthers scored once in the bottom of the eighth to prevent the shutout.

Riley Degnan took the loss on the hill despite pitching a solid game. He allowed three runs, two of them earned, in 6 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings. He fanned seven and walked four, while allowing four hits.

Sebring High School graduate Gerig Blackman closed out the game for the Panthers, allowing one run in 2 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings.

Former Blue Streak Jordan Austin led the Panthers with a pair of base hits and Blaise Maris knocked in South Florida's lone run, bringing home yet another former Blue Streak, Matt Portis.

The Panthers dropped to 1-3 in Suncoast Conference play with the loss and 13-13 overall.

The teams have two more games left in the three-game series with the Panthers visiting St. Petersburg today and wrapping up things with a game at Panther Field on Friday.

On Sunday, the Panthers dropped a 3-2 contest to visiting Lincoln Land Community College, making its usual trip to Florida from Illinois.

The Loggers took a 3-0 lead in the top of the seventh inning, before the Panthers made things interesting. Dasani Thomas hit a solo home run and Quentin Davis knocked in Equon Smith, as the Panthers pulled within one in the bottom of the eighth inning, but were unable to tie the score.

Thomas and Davis both had a pair of hits in the game and South Florida got a solid start from Josh Heckman, who allowed two runs over six innings.

Drenis Ozuna is leading the Panthers with a .389 batting average and Pedro Castellano has a team-high 20 RBI. Smith is hitting .333 with a team-high 10 stolen bases and Davis is batting .322 and has driven in 18 runs.

South Florida State College will also be at home on Saturday, when Hillsborough Community College visits to open a three-game series.

Eagles soar past Panthers

Disastrous start too much for SFSC to overcome

HIGHLANDS NEWS-SUN SPORTS STAFF

The South Florida State College Panthers ran into a buzz saw Monday night, as Polk State College scored 11 runs in the top of the first inning and tacked on six more in the second to race out to a 17-0 lead. The game was called after seven innings, with the Eagles leading 19-0.

The loss was the second straight for the Panthers and the fourth time in five games South Florida State College was on the wrong end of the scoreboard. The Panthers are 16-19 overall and 3-9 in Suncoast Conference play.

The Eagles only had 12 hits in the game, but took advantage of six walks and six South Florida State College errors. Polk State College didn't have a single player with more than two hits or two RBIs, getting contributions from up and down the lineup.

The Panthers' lone hit was a double by Equon Smith and Damani Thomas drew a walk, which was all the offense the Panthers could manage in the game.

The Panthers open a series with fifth-place Florida Southwestern State College tonight in Fort Myers and



HIGHLANDS NEWS-SUN FILE PHOTO

South Florida State College's Eric Schulte fouls off a pitch. The Panthers travel to Fort Myers tonight.

return home to face Bucs on Friday. The two teams conclude the series on Saturday in Fort Myers. Florida Southwestern is the lone Suncoast

Conference team the Panthers haven't faced yet this season.

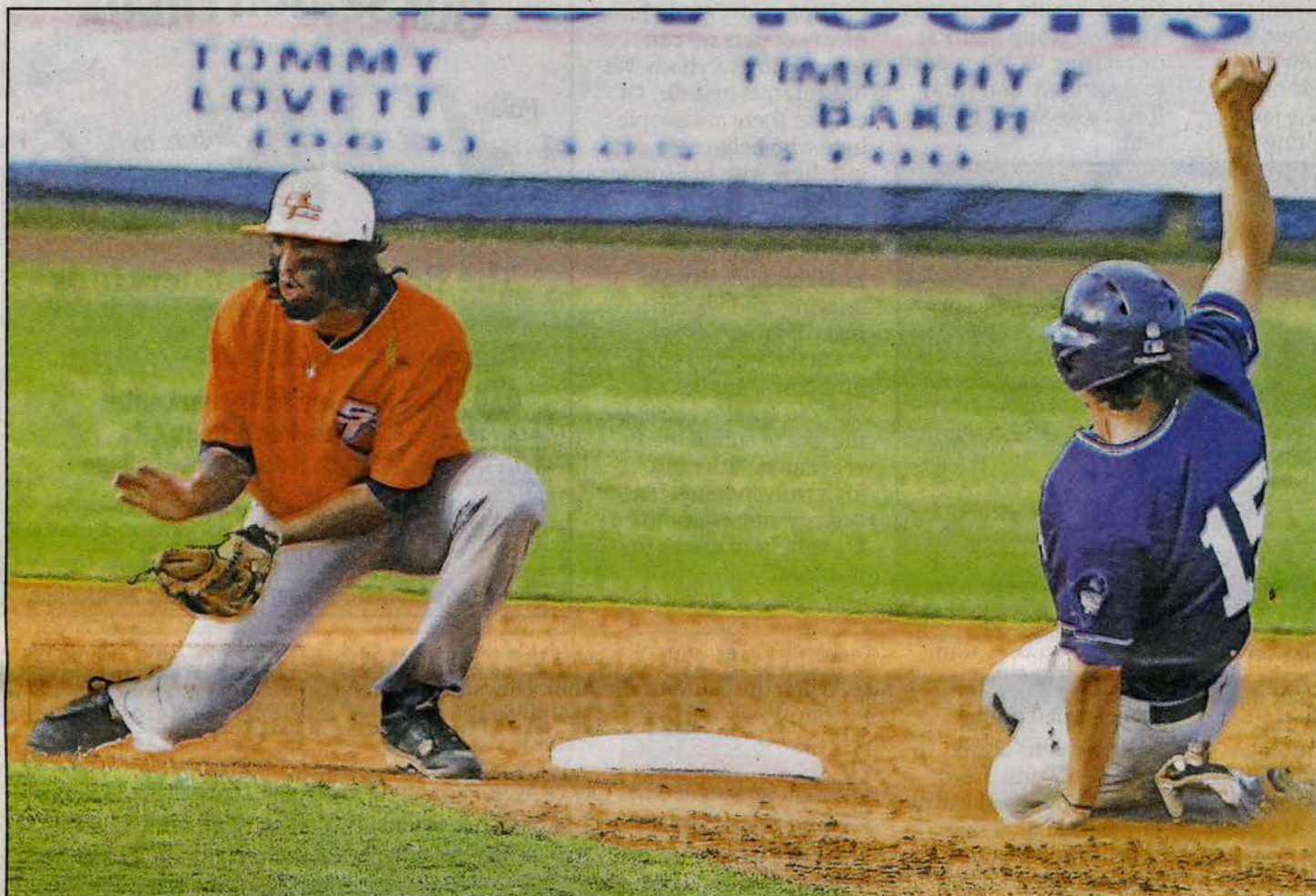
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PANTHERS

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Polk State College leads the Suncoast Conference with a 9-3 record, with St. Petersburg College and State College of Florida tied for second place with 7-5 records. Hillsborough Community College is 6-6, followed by Florida Southwestern and South Florida State College.

Panthers split pair with Bucs



MARK PINSON/STAFF

Florida Southwestern College's JD Dutka steals second base as South Florida shortstop Brett Norwood waits for the throw during Friday's game.

SFSC wins Friday, but drops Saturday's rubber game

By MARK PINSON
STAFF WRITER

AVON PARK — South Florida State College combined timely hitting with solid pitching to earn a much-needed 5-1 Suncoast Conference victory over Florida Southwestern College on Friday at Panther Field.

"We're in a close game mode so to speak," said veteran Panther Coach Rick Hitt. "We've been on the short end of several of them the last couple of weeks. We're finding a way to win once every three games and we're finding a way for the other club to win. We

just need an extra play, an extra pitch, a defensive play or a hit in the late innings to get over the hump and turn those games into wins."

South Florida got on the scoreboard in the bottom of the first inning as leadoff batter Equon Smith singled to right field, Brett Norwood walked and the fleet-footed Smith stole third base.

Quentin Davis followed with a slow-hit ground ball to second base that scored Smith and moved Norwood to second base.

Designated hitter Drenis Ozuna laced a double to right field to plate Norwood

to give the Panthers a 2-0 lead.

South Florida left-hander Josh Bobrowski, who scattered five hits in his seven innings of work, cruised through the Buccaneers lineup in the top of the second inning.

The Panthers struck again in the bottom of the frame as Franco Comacho struck out, but reached first base on a passed ball.

Florida Southwestern College right-hander Vince Vannell uncorked a wild pitch to move Comacho to

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second base. A passed ball allowed Comacho to advance to third base and Jordan Austin came through with a run-scoring single to right field to make it 3-0.

"We had a great approach at the plate in the first couple of innings," Hitt said. "Their pitcher was good, but we banged some balls the other way, hit some line drives and had three or four guys in a row go with the opposite field approach which was good to see."

Florida Southwestern College broke through in the top of the fifth inning as Phillip Felicien reached on an infield error, moved to second base on a ground out and raced home on a single to right field by Jonathan Cosme to pull the Buccaneers within 3-1.

Bobrowski, who struck out four and walked four to earn the win, settled down and escaped a two-out, two-on jam in the top of the seventh inning by getting a fly ball to left



MARK PINSON/STAFF

South Florida State College's Franco Comacho puts the ball in play during Friday's Suncoast Conference game against Florida Southwestern College

field for the final out to keep the Panthers on top by a score of 3-1.

"Josh pitched well," Hitt said. "He's had several quality starts lately and has done a good job for us."

South Florida tacked on a couple of insurance runs in the bottom of the eighth inning.

With two outs, Davis was hit by a pitch by Buccaneers reliever Jonathan Gettys and Ozuna singled to right field with Davis moving

to third base.

Ozuna stole second base and catcher Blaise Maris lined a two-run single to centerfield to put the Panthers up by a score of 5-1.

South Florida right-hander Gerig Blackman, who pitched a scoreless eighth inning in relief of Bobrowski, allowed a one-out single in the top of the ninth, but retired the next two batters to secure the conference win for the Panthers.

"That was a good rally

and a big knock two-out knock by Blaise," Hitt said. "Our guys are playing hard and battling every game and every run is important. Gerig came in and changed speeds, threw strikes from different arm angles and got guys out."

Florida Southwestern rebounded with a 3-2 victory over the Panthers on Saturday to drop South Florida to 17-20 overall and 4-10 in Suncoast Conference play.



South Florida's Josh Bobrowski earned the win against Florida Southwestern College by scattering five hits in seven innings of work in Friday's game.

South Florida begins the second half of its Suncoast Conference schedule with a home game tonight against State College of Florida.

"This starts the second series with every team," said Hitt. "This could really flip the season for us if we can find a way to win some of these close games. Our guys are trying to figure

out why things haven't gone our way since they work so hard, but that's the way life is. That's why baseball is such a great correlation to the game of life. Things don't always go the way you want, but you have to keep fighting. We're learning a lot about ourselves and not only as baseball players."