

'The Nutcracker' stops at SFSC

SPECIAL TO HIGHLANDS
NEWS-SUN

AVON PARK — The South Carolina Ballet returns to South Florida State College with the holiday classic "The Nutcracker" at 7 p.m. Tuesday in the 1,460-seat Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts on the Highlands Campus.

The magical and spectacular story about a toy nutcracker that takes Clara into a world of fantasy and fun with a Sugar Plum Fairy, Mouse King and Mother Ginger. Tickets are \$29, \$34 and \$39. Children and students receive a 50 percent discount.

"This is a gorgeous production with a magic Christmas tree, toys that come to life and a joyous woodland snow scene," said Director of SFSC Cultural Programs Cindy Garren, "I've been very surprised by the number of Highlands County residents that have never seen a production of The Nutcracker and this will be their last chance since we will not bring The Nutcracker back for the next three years."

South Carolina Ballet Executive Director William Starrett auditioned local children in

October to perform a variety of roles with the professional company. Nancy McDuffee, who resides in Sebring and teaches at Dance Unlimited, is the local ballet mistress who has been rehearsing the young dancers since October.

Starrett got his start at San Francisco's Ballet Celeste and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. He was a medalist in the USA International Ballet Competition, which is one of the world's top competitions for ballet.

Starrett was a principal dancer for the Joffrey Ballet and the American Ballet Theater under the direction of Mikhail Baryshnikov. He has made guest appearances with more than 40 of the world's most renowned ballet companies.

This performance is funded in part by a grant from South Arts in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts. South Arts strengthens the South through advancing excellence in the arts, connecting the arts to key state and national policies and nurturing a vibrant quality of life.

Florida Hospital is the presenting sponsor of the production. Additional sponsors are: Dr. Andrew and Beth Kulick; Carol

Emery; Dr. Catherine Cornelius; Joan Hartt; All Around Septic and Sewer Inc, and the SFSC Foundation.

Groups of 12 or more save 15 percent and receive one free ticket for the group coordinator. Tickets can be purchased online at www.sfscarts.org or by visiting the Wildstein Box Office on the Highlands campus of South Florida State College located at 600 W. College Drive in Avon Park.

The Wildstein Center box office is open Monday through Friday, 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. To phone the Wildstein Center Box Office call 863-784-7178.

South Florida State College presents over 30 national and internationally touring artists at the 1,460-seat Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts and the 250-seat University Center located on the Highlands Campus at 600 West College Drive in Avon Park.

Upcoming performances include the Original Stars of American Bandstand on Jan. 8, Chubby Checker and Mary Wilson on Feb. 1, Mutt's Gone Nuts on Jan. 27 and the national Broadway tour of Amazing Grace on Feb. 8.

USDA grants SFSC funds to grow olives

SPECIAL TO HIGHLANDS
NEWS-SUN

AVON PARK — South Florida State College (SFSC) has partnered with the Hardee County Industrial Development Authority (IDA) to secure a \$150,102 United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Specialty Crop grant to research and grow olive trees.

Beginning Jan. 1, the "From Orange Juice to Olive Oil" project will bring olive trees from Tunisia and additional low-chill varieties from other regions to Florida's Heartland, where climate and soil composition present a great potential for growth.

"We are thrilled to receive our newest grant from the USDA to research and grow olive trees in Hardee County," said Dr. Thomas C. Leitzel, president of SFSC. "With the introduction of olive trees to our region, we are opening the door to further diversifying our regional agricultural market to include not only olive fruit crops, but also secondary crops such as alternative biofuels and olive leaf extract."

Throughout this two-year project, SFSC faculty member, Dr. Cate Cover,

will collaborate with the Hardee County IDA to engage SFSC students in research, education and extension activities designed to expand olive production in Central Florida.

The research team will evaluate success of new low-chill olive varieties, develop agronomic practices and pest management recommendations for commercial olive production, evaluate irrigation practices to reduce ambient grove temperature and increase chill hours and develop education and support programming for local growers to expand into olive production.

By the end of the two-year project, the team will have identified ideal olive varieties for both flatwoods and ridge growing environments, published a series of grower support materials and engaged 200 growers and producers in olive cultivation activities.

"Hardee County IDA is excited to be partnering with SFSC on this opportunity to further develop a potential alternative agricultural crop," said Bill Lambert, director of Hardee County Economic Development. "It is anticipated that alternative crops such as olives will allow our

economy to maintain its agriculture roots, while diversifying from the dependency upon one 'mono-culture,' such as citrus.

"We have a strong commitment through this grant to gain knowledge, understanding and to gather important data necessary to potentially develop this new sector of our economy. Having the ability to work in conjunction with SFSC on this endeavor is a wonderful opportunity, and we are anxious to get started." By evaluating a number of new specialty crops to replace lost citrus production, Hardee County IDA has found that olives present the most promising near-term specialty crop.

However, additional research and data are needed to develop a viable commercial olive production road map for the region, which the USDA grant funds will provide.

Currently, Hardee County IDA has a test plot of 19 different low-chill olive cultivars, including major varieties for production of olive oil, black mission olives and specialty whole fruit olives, as well as olive leaf extract.

"This grant is the result of a truly wonderful partnership with Hardee County IDA to further regional agriculture economic development efforts," said Dr. Lindsay Lynch, director of grants development and federal

relations at SFSC. "These funds will support the applied research activities needed to establish olives as an emerging alternative crop for Florida's Heartland."

There are more than 500 olive varieties, each with its own unique recipe of environmental and agronomic conditions needed to reach commercial production. The

funds from this USDA grant will provide Hardee County producers interested in launching their own olive-growing operations, with much needed guidance on the best cultivars for the region, successful agronomic practices, strategies to increase chill hours and integrated pest management protocol.

SFSC board approves strategic plan

By **MARC VALERO**
STAFF WRITER

AVON PARK — The South Florida State College District Board of Trustees approved recently the college's Strategic Plan 2018-2022, which notes the increasing number of retirees impacting the national and local economy.

The SFSC strategic plan provides direction for prioritizing future initiatives, allocating

limited resources and providing a framework for defining the college's mission, vision and goals.

The 2018-2022 plan is titled "Destination 2022" and becomes active on July 1, 2018.

The plan's demographic component notes that with the increased number of retirees, there will be a demand for a more service-related economy with a high need for medical, retail

and age-appropriate recreational and leisure opportunities.

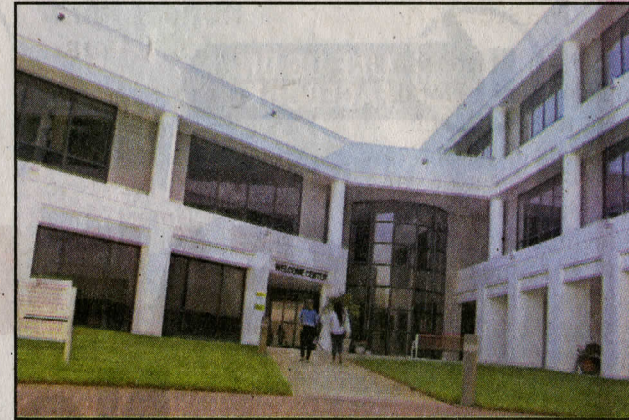
Hispanic enrollment across all academic programs at SFSC have grown steadily since 2001, according to the plan. Hispanic students presently comprise about 34 percent of the college's student population and will continue to rise.

Florida's population growth rate will continue to increase as a result of the state's strong

economic recovery, the plan shows.

High school completion rates in the college's service area (Highlands, Hardee and DeSoto counties) will continue to fall below state and national averages, the plan states.

Qualified adjunct faculty in many disciplines in the SFSC service district, and particularly in DeSoto and Hardee counties, will remain scarce.



MARC VALERO/STAFF

The SFSC Strategic Plan 2018-2022 notes that Hispanic enrollment has steadily grown since 2001 and will continue to rise.

SFSC adds manufacturing certificate programs

AVON PARK — South Florida State College has added five new college credit certificate programs for the Spring 2018 term, designed to prepare students for the workforce with manufacturing technical skills.

At its meeting Wednesday, the SFSC Board of Trustees approved the curriculum proposals, including the manufacturing certificate programs designed to prepare students to be successful in today's

rapidly changing high performance production and advanced manufacturing workforce.

"The five certificates approved yesterday [Wednesday] are integral components of our new mechanics program and are embedded into the two-year Associate in Science degree in engineering technology. Thus, it will use various components of the mechatronic equipment we recently purchased and installed on our campus," said Erik Christensen, dean of applied sciences and technologies at SFSC.

"Last month, we had one college credit certificate (CCC) program approved, so now we have a total of six," he said.

Depending upon which electives a student takes, they will earn several of these CCCs en route to their associate of arts degree, Christensen noted. Other students may only come for a specific certificate.

"In this manner, we are providing multiple pathways to earn a post-secondary credential in our quest to help students get a job, keep a job, or be promoted in a job," he said.

The manufacturing program additions approved Wednesday are:

- Automation - 12 credit hours.
- CNC Machinist/Fabricator - 12 credit hours.
- Engineering Technology Support Specialist - 18 credit



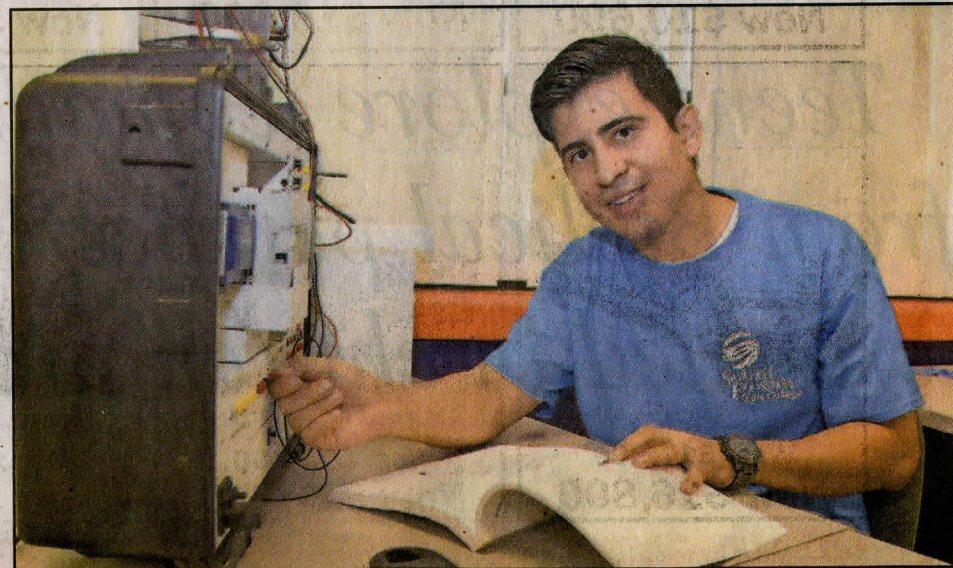
COURTESY PHOTOS

Various components of the mechatronic equipment South Florida State College recently purchased will be used for the new college credit certificate programs.

hours.

- Lean Manufacturing - 12 credit hours.
- Pneumatics, Hydraulics and Motors for Manufacturing - 12 credit hours.

Some of the new courses (three credit hours) within these programs are: Introduction to Programmable Logic Controllers, Manufacturing Processes and Materials, Introduction to Quality Assurance, Production and Inventory Control and Introduction to Electricity and Electronics.



Introduction to Electricity and Electronics is a new three-credit-hour course offered at South Florida State College

Ready for college



COURTESY PHOTO

Shauna Norwood, center, is a 2018 Take Stock in Children Leaders 4 Life fellow. Appearing with her are, from left, front row, Danielle Ochoa, Take Stock Student Success Coach, Irene Castanon, and Take Stock College Success Coach Linda Roman; (back row) Suan Eells, Shawn Norwood, Jamie Bateman, and Thomas Leitzel, SFSC president.

Shauna Norwood receives \$40,000 Leaders 4 Life Scholarship

SPECIAL TO HIGHLANDS NEWS-SUN

AVON PARK — Over the past eight years, five local Take Stock in Children scholars have won prestigious Leaders 4 Life scholarships, and on Dec. 7 Shauna Norwood became the sixth.

The \$40,000 scholarship will pay for Norwood's living accommodations, textbooks, and other needs while she pursues her bachelor's degree in medical technology at the University of South Florida.

The daughter of Shawn Norwood and Susan Eells, Norwood is dually enrolled in Hardee Senior High School and South Florida State College's Collegiate High School. She is currently ranked 13th in her high school class of 284 students with a weighted GPA of 4.22. She graduates from high school this month and will receive her Associate in Arts degree from SFSC in May.

Once she completes her bachelor's degree, she plans to earn a certificate in cytotechnology from Piedmont College in Athens, Georgia.

Norwood's ultimate goal is to become a laboratory technician who specializes in examining cells for cancer. She was inspired to embark on this career after her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer.

Norwood learned she received the scholarship at the SFSC Foundation's annual luncheon. While she was expressing her gratitude for her experiences with Take Stock in Children, Santa Claus delivered the good news with the help of SFSC Foundation Executive Director Jamie Bateman.

Irene Castanon, the local Take Stock coordinator, was gratified to see the scholarship go to a student she personally mentored. "Shauna is truly a devoted, confident and

studious student," Caston said. "She has a great work ethic and volunteers whenever there is a need. More importantly, her family is her rock, and that is the reason she is a very genuine person."

Take Stock in Children, Inc. is a nonprofit organization that provides high-achieving, low-income students with mentors who coach them from middle school through their transition to college. Students who complete the program receive a scholarship that covers the first two years of college or additional vocational training. The SFSC Foundation is the lead agency for Take Stock in DeSoto, Hardee, and Highlands counties.

For more information about becoming a Take Stock mentor or making a donation, call the Foundation at 863-453-3133 or visit southflorida.edu/giving.

SFSC's water certification courses timed to demand

By SHASTA MOTT

ARCADIAN CORRESPONDENT

An opportunity to provide new jobs and job advancements is in place, thanks to area water management and utilities' leaders who met with South Florida State College/DeSoto just over a year ago in order to put this plan in place.

The concern at that time was there was no centrally located opportunity for schooling for water treatment or wastewater licensing, coupled with a "graying out" (more workers retiring in the field than entering) and a growing demand for such programs, those officials said.

Responding to the need of our community, SFSC DeSoto applied to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection for approval of curriculum and coursework in January 2017. The course was approved a few weeks later, and classes for the 6-month course began in August.

The Water Treatment Certification program currently meets two nights a week, and one 4-hour Saturday a month for six months.

A huge part of the process was the instructor, J.T. Torrance, who has AA-certified licenses (water and wastewater) and works daily in the water field. The course follows the track of the California State University textbooks

for the coursework. But Torrance provides much more, with hands-on lab work, trips to local facilities and life experience in the lessons he teaches as a utilities expert with Hardee County.

"Offering one-on-one support is crucial for many students. It's also important to cover the 'need-to-know' information which is often hard for an individual to figure out when studying on their own," Torrance said as he prepared for a Tuesday class in Arcadia.

Student Paul Allison agreed, adding, "Having the class is easier when there's someone to help walk you through the material, instead of trying to learn it

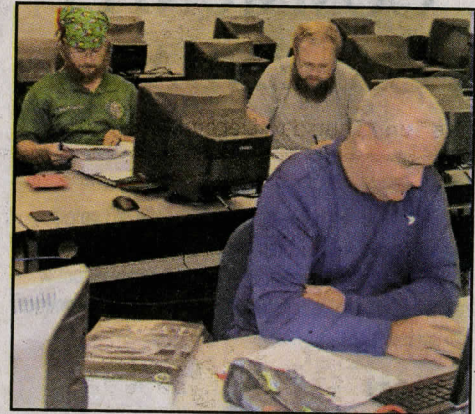


PHOTO PROVIDED

The Water Treatment Certification program currently meets two nights a week, and one 4-hour Saturday a month for six months.

WATER

FROM PAGE 5

all on your own."

All of the five students taking the classes were appreciative of the opportunity to have this course locally.

"This is a late in life career change," said Wayne Greer, smiling. "Looking for a way out of the manual labor field."

Brendon Segroves, one of two city of Arcadia employees enrolled in the program, noted his appreciation for the city paying his program tuition. "I've

wanted to do this since high school," he said. "I knew it was a good job with good pay but there were no courses. I've been waiting for this course for years."

SFSC staff will soon apply to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection for the wastewater course approval, and expects to offer it starting this summer with the same schedule for the 6-month course.

SFSC is also working with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to gain approval for the water treatment classes to be added to a list of approved classes that can be paid for with GI Bill benefits. southflorida.edu.

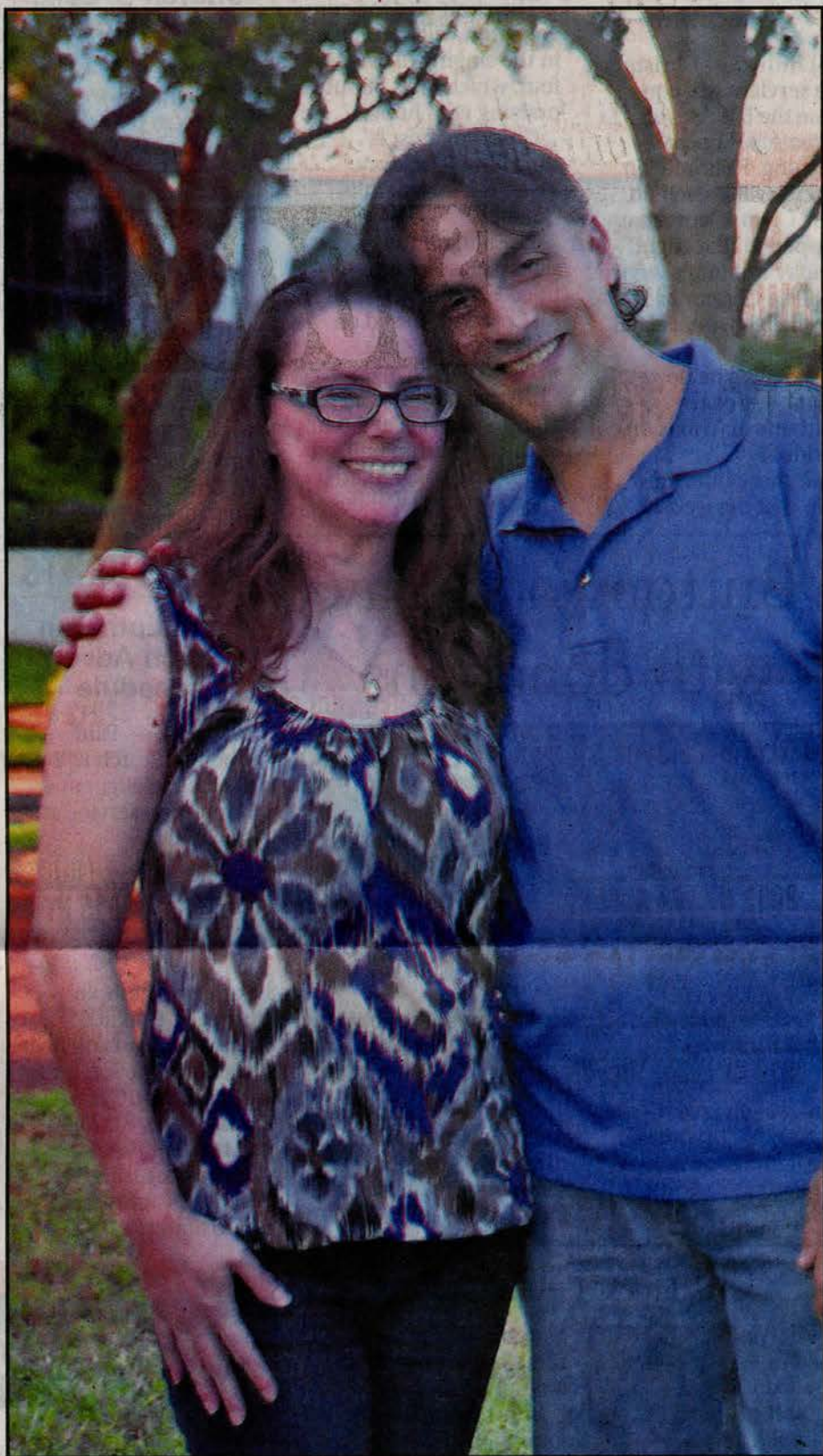
SFSC graduates *balancing college, work, and family through* Teamwork

AVON PARK — Angelo and Coren Russo have been married for five years and are a testament to teamwork in every sense. Over those five years, they've been working on degrees at South Florida State College. During SFSC's commencement Thursday, the Russos earned their Bachelor of Applied Science degrees in Supervision and Management (BAS-SM). In fact, Angelo was the college's student commencement speaker.

"I always wanted to have a degree," Coren said. "I had children first, and then I wanted to accomplish something else. I wanted an associate degree, but then I thought, 'Let's keep this going.' Now that I have my bachelor's degree, I'm feeling like 'Let's keep this going.' I've been tossing around the idea of database administration. I want a master's degree in something just to say I could."

"Coren started college to better herself, so she encouraged me to go as well so that we were each other's rocks in this effort," Angelo said. In fall 2014, he received an Associate in Science degree in computer information systems, and Coren earned her Associate in Arts degree from SFSC.

For many students, college, work, and family become a balancing act. "We missed out on family and friend get-togethers and some holidays," Angelo said. "We both took three courses while working full time. You have to give up some of your life when you go to college. It requires a sacrifice in some areas of your life, but it's worth it in the long run."



COURTESY PHOTO

Coren and Angelo Russo, residents of Highlands County, in December 2014.

As a previous non-traditional student, Dr. Tina Adams, lead instructor for the BAS-SM program, understands the challenges students face as they attempt to balance academics, work, and family. "This couple did an

excellent job supporting each other and making sacrifices when necessary to ensure that they successfully finished the program," she said.

TEAM

FROM PAGE 1

The support for each other throughout their academic careers was invaluable. "Coren and I would quiz each other on the way to the campus," Angelo said. "We bounced ideas off of each other for some of our class projects."

"We wouldn't let the other one procrastinate," Coren said. "If one of us wanted to watch TV or go out to dinner, Angelo or I would finish writing our assignment for class first. We held each other accountable."

Coren indicated that she and Angelo had a particular BAS-SM class together in which Dr. Adams separated them because, "Apparently, Angelo and I are both strong leaders. We're both Type A."

"There were times I wanted to quit," Coren said. "But not because of school." Coren's father passed away a few years ago, she lost one of her best friends, and her best friend lost her father. "I needed to focus on something, so I took the semester off. Dr. Adams was definitely a positive influence. She told me that I could take some time off, but that I must come back to finish the program."

Although Angelo could have graduated in May 2017, he held off and waited to graduate with Coren. The final course in the BAS-SM program, the capstone course, was coming up and they



COURTESY PHOTO

Angelo and Coren Russo at South Florida State College's commencement exercise.

wanted to take the class together. "We heard that people were stressing out about it, that the projects are crazy hard," Angelo said.

"But it's not. It's just that the structure of the class is different from others. We had to create a strategic profile of a company — what problems they're having, pick a problem, do research, surveys, and make recommendations on how to fix the problem," he said. "Every class we've had throughout this program, everything we've learned is rolled up in the capstone course. It helped me develop leadership skills and to work with groups and teams to find a solution to a problem."

Although Angelo's final GPA in college classes is 3.94 and Coren's is 3.65, they never considered each other academic rivals. "We wanted to show our son, Ronnie, the importance of good grades because he had a problem with grades when he was younger," Coren said. "We wanted

him to have something to be proud of, something that he accomplished, with a little nudge from us."

Apparently, the Russos inspired their son. Currently, Ronnie takes honors classes and college classes at Atlantic Technical College and High School in Broward County. He has a 4.14 GPA.

After graduation, Angelo will continue to work in the Information Technology Department at the Avon Park Correctional Institution, and Coren recently accepted a position as a project manager with a company in Fort Myers. For the time being, she and Angelo simply want to enjoy life. "I want to read books that I choose, not assigned reading, and play my video games," she said.

But Coren takes great pride in her educational accomplishments and believes, "People can take your house, your money, but no one can take your education. It's yours and yours alone."

Health Science Students At SFSC Receive Scholarships

Students studying for careers in the health sciences at South Florida State College received more than \$21,000 in scholarships during the December meeting of the college's District Board of Trustees.

Florida Blue Nursing and Allied Health Scholarships were awarded to SFSC students in nursing, dental education, and radiography programs. The students may use the scholarships for tuition, textbooks, lab fees and child care.

Students receiving the scholarships included these Hardee County residents:

- Nursing: Erica DeLoera, Sonya Fowler, Yesenia

Losano, Dennis Mejia and Savannah Taylor.

- Dental Education: Soraya Castillo, Diela Darceus and Lisset Paulino.

- Radiography: Melissa Hernandez and Christian Pena.

The scholarships are the result of a partnership between the Florida College System Foundation and Florida Blue. The Florida Blue Nursing and Allied Health Scholarship was created to sustain a source of funding for student scholarships at Florida's colleges to meet the growing need for skilled nurses and allied health professionals who serve the state's diverse population.

The SFSC Foundation Inc.

provided a 50 percent match of the original \$10,696 provided by the FCS Foundation and Florida Blue, as the funds must be matched dollar for dollar by private donors at the local level.

"For some students, the scholarship from the FCS Foundation and Florida Blue may be the only financial assistance they receive," said Jamie Bateman, SFSC's executive director of Institutional Advancement. "Because of these two organizations, our students can continue their studies with the long-term goal of providing exceptional health care throughout our communities."



COURTESY PHOTOS

Dental education students receiving a scholarship included (front row, from left) Lisset Paulino, Naseana Sullivan and Soraya Castillo with Dr. Deborah Milliken, chair, Dental Education; (back row) Anna Wiley, Carmen Mitchell and Diela Darceus.



Students in the nursing program who were awarded scholarships were (front row, left) Crystal Oliveros, Rodine Walker, Yesenia Losano, Crystal Parker and Palavi Agarwal; (back) Dennis Mejia, Monike Thomas, Faustina Ramirez, Savannah Taylor, Hector Ramirez and Susan Mathis.



Radiography scholarships went to students (front row, left) Alicia Hayles and Melissa Hernandez; (back) SFSC District Board of Trustees Vice Chair Tami Cullens with students Rosela LaPointe and Christian Pena and Institutional Advancement Executive Director Jamie Bateman.