



COURTESY PHOTO

Florida Hospital Heartland Medical Center has donated \$75,000 to South Florida State College to fund an additional nursing faculty position and to expand the program to meet a critical need for nurses in the region. With the demand for nurses expected to rise by 20 percent over the next 10 years, those who obtain nursing degrees from SFSC have a 100-percent job placement rate. Many students obtain jobs before graduation day. "We are extremely proud of the quality education delivered by our nursing faculty," said Dr. Thomas C. Leitzel, president of SFSC. Shown with the donation are (from left) Randy Surber, CEO and president of Florida Hospital Heartland; Cathy Jaco, chief nursing officer and vice president of Patient Care Services for Florida Hospital Heartland; Mary von Merveldt, SFSC director of nursing education; and Leitzel.

SFSC Welcomes Lee Cockerell for convocation

SPECIAL TO HIGHLANDS
NEWS-SUN

AVON PARK — South Florida State College (SFSC) will welcome former Walt Disney World Executive Vice President of Operations Lee Cockerell at its annual Convocation on Monday, Aug. 13. Cockerell will speak about the importance of customer service and leadership throughout all areas of business.

“We are extremely fortunate to have Mr. Cockerell join us for Convocation,” said Dr. Thomas C. Leitzel, president of SFSC. “He is impressive and inspiring. His delivery style is engaging and the message he provides will be meaningful, relevant, and memorable as it comes from his many years of shaping the guest experience at nearby Walt Disney World.”

At Disney, Cockerell led a team of 40,000 cast members and managed the operations of 20



COURTESY PHOTO

Former Walt Disney World Executive Vice President of Operations Lee Cockerell.

resort hotels, four theme parks, two water parks, a shopping and entertainment plaza, and the ESPN sports and recreation complex. He established a legacy of service training through Disney Great Leader Strategies, which he created to educate and develop 7,000 leaders throughout Walt Disney World. Prior to arriving at Disney to open Disneyland Paris in 1990,

Cockerell held hospital-ity positions for Hilton Hotels and the Marriott Corporation.

Currently, Cockerell travels the globe speaking about leadership, management, and service excellence. He has written several books based on his professional experience, including “Creating Magic: 10 Common Sense Leadership Strategies from a Life at Disney” and “The Customer Rules: The 39 Essential Rules for Delivering Sensational Service.”

With convocation signifying the beginning of the 2018-19 academic year, SFSC employees will enjoy Cockerell’s presentation and book signing, along with departmental meetings, training, and staff awards. All SFSC campus locations will be closed from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday, Aug. 13 for convocation.

The fall term begins on Friday, Aug. 17 and registration is still open. Visit southflorida.edu for more information.

Keysto success

What will help students get the most out of school?

MELISSA MAIN
STAFF WRITER

SEBRING — Parents and students are bright and hopeful with the start of a new year, but how can this year be a success? What makes a difference in students passing a grade or graduating from high school?

Reading, organization and proper sleep are key components to success. Reading is required in every subject. The older students become, the more they are required to learn material from textbooks on their own.



COURTESY PHOTOS

Isaac Dailey enjoys "reading" picture books. His mom, dad and older brother read to him.

Certified teacher Allison Dailey said, "When I have tutored students who were behind in reading, many times it was because they did not have the experience of someone sitting down and reading with them. For parents with busy life-styles, they can get an audio book for their students. Students can follow along with the words that are read and learn how to pronounce unfamiliar words.

"However, it's best to have someone to read to the student — a parent, an older sibling, a grandparent or a fun aunt," she said.

Dailey follows blogger Sarah MacKenzie and her Read-aloud Revival website, which encourages and better equips parents to read with their children. The Read-aloud website states, "When we read together, we're seeing through the same lens, hooking arms on an adventure. We're experiencing something bigger than ourselves, and we're doing it side-by-side."

MacKenzie writes, "I'm here to remind you that the act of picking up a book and sharing it with your child is probably the easiest thing you'll do all day ... and the most important."

Renee Ladue, a former homeschool mom, shared her insights. Ladue's son and daughter graduated from high school with their Associate of Arts degrees from South Florida State College with nearly perfect grade point averages.



Katie Ladue graduated from high school with her AA degree from SFSC, a rare accomplishment. Her mother credits much of her academic success to her love for reading.

"We started reading to them as babies," Ladue said. "Everything we did — no matter where we were — we used as an educational opportunity."

Ladue examined each child's needs when providing help. She advises parents to consider how their children learn best and what type of encouragement they need most. "My son Kevin needed more words of affirmation, and Katie needed more time spent with her."

Instead of just telling students to do their homework, Ladue believes that more involvement is necessary.

"Some kids need you to

sit with them as they

do their homework," she said.

Betty Parker, a former Highlands County teacher who taught kindergarten for 23 years, said, "Parents should read to children from birth." She recommends making reading a daily part of a child's life. Students who enjoy learning seem to succeed best, she said.

Concordia University made a similar statement on their education website, Education.cu-portland.edu. "Early exposure to reading appears to pay off in that it creates an expectation in children that reading is an essential part of their daily lives, thus the families of pre-readers in preschool, kindergarten and early elementary must be encouraged to expose them to reading through story time at the library or reading as a daily habit in the home."

How much should students read every day? According to Concordia University, "Research supports the strong positive correlative effect of 20-60 minutes of daily reading."

However, the amount of time best suited for each child varies. "Low-level readers benefit from 15-20 minutes whereas high-level readers get the greatest benefit from reading 45 minutes or more," Concordia University states.

Time management is another critical element to student success, according to Opportunity.org. Students who wait until the last minute to complete assignments may feel overwhelmed. Parents can help students by showing them how to break down assignments into manageable tasks.

Many students have planners that are provided by the school, and parents can help students write down one part of



Kevin Ladue graduated summa cum laude from South Florida State College while a senior in high school.

Kaius Duvall prepared for his first day of kindergarten by learning 150 basic sight words and learning all of his letters and sounds. In addition, his parents began reading to him at birth.

SCHOOL

FROM PAGE 1A

an assignment each day for a complex project.

When students work hard in school and manage time wisely, their hard work should be rewarded. Brittany Queen, parent of five children who attend public school, said, "If you earn an A, you get \$20. If you earn a B, you get \$10. If you earn a C (because you're lazy), it takes away an A! If you are trying your best and a C is what you get, OK. Let's work on it. I expect good grades because that is their payment for their jobs!"

Opportunity.org recommends that students reward themselves for finishing each chunk of an assignment, making studying more fun.

Parent Desiree Duvall utilizes this approach with her son, Kaius. When he was studying over the summer, he earned 10 minutes of screen time — computer, tablet, phone or television — for each page he completed from his workbook. This approach allowed him to have fun, but it also prepared him for kindergarten. Kaius is able to read 150 sight words and he knows all of his sounds and letters.

For older students, it is never too late to learn to read. Parents can read with older children, alternating reading pages of a chapter book. Students in high school and middle school can also benefit from reading along with audio books. The assigned school novel may be challenging for them, but as they read along with the audio production, their comprehension and word recognition skills will increase.

Another key factor in being prepared for school is getting the needed rest. The University of



COURTESY PHOTO

From left, David and Ben Dailey read together. Their family believes in making reading a positive experience and setting out books for them to see. Their mom reads aloud to them on a daily basis.

Michigan states, "Sleep deprivation in students has been linked to lower GPAs because sleep affects concentration, memory and the ability to learn."

How can students get better sleep? The University of Michigan offered the following suggestions:

Stop using cell phones, laptops, video games and all electronics at least 30 minutes before bed. The artificial light blocks the body's melatonin, which helps people fall asleep.

Relax for at least 30 minutes prior to trying to fall asleep. Worrying causes people to lose sleep. Instead, students should try to write down things that are bothering them in a journal. This

can help with stress reduction.

Go outside and spend time in the sunshine. Natural daylight helps to regulate the body's sleep cycles.

Exercise every day, but not right before bedtime.

Avoid caffeine after 3 p.m. Drink something besides soda or tea for the evening meal.

Keep a regular sleep schedule. Only sleep in an extra hour on the weekends. The body needs to get into a rhythm for sleeping.

With a focus on improving reading skills, managing time better and getting a good night's night, better grades are possible, which should equate to a successful school year.

SFSC Earns Gold Status Once Again

For the second year in a row, South Florida State College has earned gold status from the Florida College System.

Of the 28 FCS institutions, SFSC was among only five to earn gold.

Dr. Thomas C. Leitzel, president of SFSC, noted, "This year's score is near perfect. The rating puts SFSC among a group of elite Florida colleges and affirms the commitment to excellence in student services combined with quality learning initiatives led by committed members of the faculty."

The FCS uses a Performance Funding Model to issue points to each of the 28 institutions. Using a 40-point scale, the model includes four measures that are worth 10 points each: Retention Rates; Completion Rates; Job Placement/Continuing

Education Rates; and Entry-Level Wages.

The institutions are then placed in categories based on their point totals: gold, silver or bronze. This year, there were five gold, 18 silver and five bronze colleges. The points are distributed based on Improvement and Excellence, with comparisons between last year's and this year's data. SFSC scored 39.64 out of 40 possible points.

For 2018-19, the Florida Legislature and governor allocated \$60 million of general revenue to performance funding. The gold category colleges will receive both their proportional share of the funding and a point-proportional share of the funds that would have been available to the colleges that scored 29.01 points and below.

College greets students



MARC VALERO/STAFF

South Florida State College faculty and staff at the welcome back station near Building B on Monday morning.

SFSC welcomes students to Fall semester

By **MARC VALERO**
STAFF WRITER

AVON PARK — It was a warm welcome back Monday at South Florida State College as administration and staff greeted students heading to their first class of the fall term.

College President Thomas Leitzel greeted students near Building B and offered water bottles while others provided popcorn, snacks, campus maps and an SFSC cup with a pen, pencil and an SFSC hacky sack.

Sebring High 2017 graduate Hannelore Galati was among the new students.

She had an early start with an 8 a.m. biology class and waited in Building B for her American government class. Galati has two Monday and Wednesday classes and three Tuesday and Thursday classes.

Her goal is to become a marine biologist.

The fall semester brings a new certificate program — Public Safety Communication, which prepares students for civilian employment as a dispatcher (police, fire, and emergency medical communicator) by teaching them how to operate telephones, radios and computer terminals responding to emergency and non-emergency requests for assistance.

Students may have noticed the new “Get Connected” pole banners on campus, which are part of the college’s new marketing campaign that was introduced in July.

Get Connected is an effort to link



South Florida State College President Thomas Leitzel hands a water bottle to a student at the college’s welcome back on Monday morning.

the tri-county region (Highlands, DeSoto and Hardee) with the successful programs and services that South Florida State College offers.

SFSC Director of Institutional Communications Melissa Kuehne said Get Connected is an approachable, attainable advertising and marketing campaign that aspires to connect individuals to the skills, services, or network they need to move ahead.

Fall term registration ends today

for the regular term and the First Flex Session.

Fall term open registration begins Wednesday for the Third Flex Session.

The college anticipates an increase in enrollment after experiencing a 5.1 percent increase in enrollment for the 2017-18 academic year.

South Florida State College will also welcome back students today at Building B and Building I from 7:30-11 a.m.

SFSC granted continuing ACEN accreditation

SPECIAL TO HIGHLANDS
NEWS-SUN

AVON PARK — South Florida State College's (SFSC) Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) program recently was granted continuing accreditation from the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing Inc. (ACEN).

Continuing ACEN accreditation has been granted through spring 2026 — for eight years — the maximum number of years allowed. The ADN program was initially granted accreditation in 2013.

SFSC offers the only nationally accredited

nursing program in its service district of Highlands, Hardee, and DeSoto counties.

Notification of SFSC's ADN program continuing accreditation came to Mary von Merveldt, director of nursing education, in a letter from ACEN Chief Executive Officer Marsal P. Stoll, congratulating SFSC on its achievement. The continuing accreditation comes as the result of an intense, three-day visit to SFSC in January by three ACEN program evaluators.

In nursing education, ACEN is one of three accrediting bodies in the country that are recognized by the

U.S. Department of Education. The others are the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) and the Commission for Nursing Education Accreditation (CNEA).

ACEN accreditation is a mark of distinction, certifying that a nursing program adheres to the highest national standards of education. To become accredited, nursing programs must demonstrate that the program meets ACEN's exacting standards of quality through an extensive review.

As a result, students who graduate from ACEN-accredited institutions are more readily

accepted into other advanced degree nursing programs and have broader employment opportunities—nationally and internationally.

"Some employers, such as the Veterans Administration, only hire nurses who come from accredited programs," said Dr. Michele Heston, dean of health sciences at SFSC.

"This accreditation assures everyone that we offer a quality nursing program," von Merveldt said. "It helps to ensure that SFSC Nursing meets the same

quality standards as other accredited nursing programs—in regards to curriculum, faculty, and access to student resources."

Another benefit to accreditation is that

SFSC has greater opportunities to apply for grants that might be used to fund resources such as equipment for its teaching labs. "When

SFSC

FROM PAGE 2B

completing an application, the granting institution wants to know if your nursing program is nationally accredited," Heston said. "If not, you won't be considered for the grant."

In its final report on SFSC's ADN program, the ACEN evaluators praised the program's strength in these areas:

The "caring influence reaches far beyond the classroom and is felt by this College and the community."

"It is refreshing to know that there is a two-year RN program in your community that is not only doing excellent work, but is doing stellar work."

"Your graduates articulate the Seven Cs of Caring: Competence, Compassion, Confidence, Culture, Conscience, Commitment, and Communication, upon which your curriculum is based."

The evaluators also commended SFSC for its innovative D.U.C.K. program, its signature faculty/student mentoring program that embraces the motto: Developing Understanding, Compassion, and Knowledge.

Of particular note is that the average National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX-RN) pass rate of SFSC's ADN students last year was 100 percent, a rate exceeding the national average of 84.4 percent.

The job placement rate for the nursing students was 100 percent over that same period.

"Many individuals contributed to this accreditation process," von Merveldt said. "It's been a College-wide and communitywide effort—we had the support of the nursing department, faculty, administration, and other departments within the College as well as our advisory committee. Our community partners provided feedback in support our work that was so valued by the department and recognized by program evaluators."

SFSC's licensed practical nursing to associate degree in nursing transition program was launched in 1984. In response to community

need, the College established a traditional associate degree in nursing program in 1993.

SFSC currently offers an online Bachelor of Science in Nursing program, a two-year generic associate in nursing degree program, a one-year transition licensed practical nurse to registered nurse program, and an 11-month practical nursing occupational certificate. For more information about these programs, call 863-784-7131 or visit southflorida.edu.

These nursing programs are among several Health Sciences programs offered by SFSC and include dental hygiene, dental assisting, radiography, paramedic, and emergency medical technician.



BROOKS



CARTER



CUENCAS



FENNELL



SHAFFER

Five local advocates to be honored

Champion for Children Awards Gala set

SPECIAL TO HIGHLANDS NEWS-SUN

SEBRING — The Champion for Children Foundation of Highlands County Inc. has announced the five finalists who will be honored and celebrated at the upcoming 19th annual Judge Clifton M. Kelly Champion for Children Awards Gala.

This year, the Champion for Children Foundation received 22 nominations for the prestigious award.

The 19th annual Champion for Children Award Finalists are: Nicholas Brooks, Patricia Carter, Eddie Cuencas,

ADVOCATES

FROM PAGE 1A

Andrea Fennell and Camille Shaffer.

Originally from Alabama, Nicholas Brooks moved to Florida to attend college and has now been in Highlands County serving youth in our schools, on the courts, and across the fields for nine years. Known for his personal character, integrity and proven passion for making a difference in the lives of young people, Brooks works as a behavioral dean at Fred Wild Elementary School, coaches multiple sports, and volunteers throughout the community. He explains, "Coaches often spend more time with kids than their parents, so shame on me if I only teach them plays."

Coach Brooks emphasizes he has the unique opportunity to impact the lives of young people God has placed in his charge: "With that comes the ability to develop relationships with my athletes and prepare them for the life they have ahead."

For more than 37 years, Patricia Carter has put into practice her belief that "to value the worth and dignity of a child, and to develop and nurture each child's potential, is the greatest honor a teacher or individual can have." A Florida native and Lake Placid High School graduate, Carter has served her entire career teaching in Lake Placid, engaging her students and reinforcing family values. Currently, as a gifted teacher at Lake Country and Lake Placid Elementary schools, Carter challenges her students and their families beyond the classroom into service projects to better our community.

She said, "By committing such efforts to students in a caring environment, they recognize their potentials and become lifelong learners, eager to see how they can contribute to our society."

Eddie Cuencas moved from the Virgin Islands to Highlands County 30 years ago

and immediately found ways to serve families and minister to youth in the community. From a Farmworkers Jobs and Education program to South Florida State College, Cuencas has influenced the lives of students for more than 25 years through his teaching and demonstrating that your environment does not determine your outcome.

Known as the face of the Panther Youth Partners Program, Cuencas helps at-risk youth and young adults navigate their education and futures as the program specialist. He said, "Simple values set the stage for a student's success: respect, gratitude, self-esteem, community, and to recognize they were created with purpose." Cuencas believes, "Every time a youth accomplishes his/her goal it is always a great accomplishment."

Over 40 years ago, Andrea Fennell left Jamaica to make Highlands County her new home. Since then, she has dedicated her life to ensure children have a safe environment in which to live, food to

eat daily, the essentials for school, as well as the ability to connect with their community members without fear or judgement in their time of need. Fennell has served local families and their children for more than 32 years through her work at the Health Department and as a client advocate at Peace River Center. Her attitude of compassion, humble heart, and community service demonstrate the rare love she portrays. Fennell's motto is "Our children are invaluable," and she sees each opportunity she is given to work with and encourage local families as her greatest accomplishment.

Dancer, coach and owner of Dance Unlimited, Camille Shaffer has been positively impacting children for 26 years. A Canadian by birth, Shaffer came to Highlands County when she was 10 years old, and as a young, yet experienced dancer, she began teaching dance at the age of 15.

With a background as a behavior specialist, cheer coach, and now owning her own dance studio, "Miss Camille" has had the opportunity to work with hundreds of children in Highlands County. Her dance studio frequently serves as a second home for many, where she embodies leadership, develops character, instills confidence, and mentors lovingly. Shaffer said, "My greatest accomplishment on behalf of children is my ability to empower them to trust their own voice. To be strong, even if it means being alone."

The annual awards gala is named in honor of Judge Clifton M. Kelly, a retired circuit judge and lifelong child advocate, who passed away in 2005. Created 19 years ago, the Champion for Children Award recognizes community members who have greatly improved the quality of life for children and positively impacted youth in Highlands County. Kevin Roberts, Champion for Children Foundation founder and chairman of the board, shares that to his knowledge "Highlands

County is the only county in the nation to honor distinguished child advocates in such a formal manner."

"Our community is incredibly blessed to have these five servant-hearted heroes in our midst, positively reaching and impacting our youth," said Carissa Marine, Champion for Children Foundation CEO. "It is our distinct honor to celebrate and thank them for their dedication and service."

More than 450 community members are expected to be in attendance, by invitation only, to honor the community's heroes. Also to be presented that evening, the 2018 Hometown Hero and Distinguished Lifetime Achievement Award. The 19th annual Judge Clifton M. Kelly Champion for Children Awards Gala is sponsored by Highlands Regional Medical Center, and will be held at Grace Bible Church in Sebring at 6 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 27.

Champion
Foundation