

MOFAC hosts Pygmy Fringe Tree Wildflower Day

AVON PARK — South Florida State College's (SFSC) Museum of Florida Art and Culture (MOFAC) plays host to the Pygmy Fringe Tree Wildflower Day, a celebration of the region's native wildflowers, on Thursday, March 7, 1–2 p.m., on SFSC's Highlands Campus, in Avon Park. Admission is free and open to the public.

The celebration takes its name from the pygmy fringe tree (*Chionanthus pygmaeus*), a now rare flowering shrub that grows between 3 and

6 feet tall. The pygmy fringe tree once thrived throughout Central Florida. However, farming and development nearly swept it from the region, prompting the federal government to declare it an endangered species in 1987.

Dustin Angell, a conservation photographer and education coordinator from Archbold Biological Station in Venus, Fla., will give a talk at MOFAC on the various plants indigenous to the Lake Wales Ridge. Many of these plants grow along



COURTESY PHOTO

Dustin Angell discusses white sand on the trail.

the SFSC Wildflower Wayside Shrine Trail,

located on the grounds of SFSC's Highlands

Campus in Avon Park. Angell's presentation will occur during a time when the Pygmy Fringe Tree is typically in bloom. It is a once-a-year occurrence and a beauty to behold.

Attendees are encouraged to take a walk along the Wildflower Wayside Shrine Trail, a footpath winding its way through pristine scrubland on the SFSC Highlands Campus. The tract, blanketed by fine white sand and overspread with shrubs, is home to native wildflowers including the big flag pawpaw, sky-blue lupine,

and other endangered species, like the scrub St. John's Wort. Guidebooks detailing the plants will be available in MOFAC.

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 was conceived

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by Mollie Doctrow, former MOFAC curator and an award-winning artist whose work revolves around capturing natural habitats. The trail opened in 2011.

Visitors to the trail can write their impressions in notebooks found in wooden shrine boxes along the path. The boxes, designed by Doctrow, contain information that showcase the shrubs and wildflowers. One side of each box has a plant image in relief, allowing visitors to make a rubbing on paper as a memento of their visit.

The trail is open to the public during SFSC's regular business hours. It is located on the north



COURTESY PHOTO

Trail entrance along College Drive.

side of College Drive, across from Entrance 5.

For more information about the Pygmy Fringe Tree Wildflower Day, call Megan Stepe, curator

for MOFAC, at 863-784-7240 or visit mofac.org. To learn more about the Wildflower Wayside Shrine Trail, visit mofac.org/wayside/trail/.



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Panthers pound Land Loggers

South Florida rolls past Lincoln Land

By **JIM TAYLOR**
CORRESPONDENT

AVON PARK – The South Florida State College Panther baseball team buzz sawed through the Lincoln Land Loggers by a score of 15-4 on a mostly sunny Sunday that was tempered by a gentle breeze that made it perfect for a game on the diamond.

The Panthers, winners of their last two and four of their last five games improved to 8-13 on the season. South Florida begins Suncoast Conference play this week against Hillsborough Community College.

Lincoln Land posted an early lead as Talon File



PHOTO BY JIM TAYLOR/CORRESPONDENT

South Florida State College runner Leo Alfonzo (2) advances to second base as the Lincoln Land shortstop looks for the throw during Sunday's game. The Panthers beat the Land Loggers by a score of 15-4.

hit a two-out double into centerfield and scored on a single by Jonathan Walder into right field to give the Loggers a 1-0 lead after the top of the first inning.

The Panthers answered quickly, scoring four runs with two outs to forge ahead of the Loggers 4-1 after the first inning.

Pierson Lewis started the inning with a walk, after a strikeout and a ground out to short, Lewis was standing on second with two outs. Casey Asman resolved the situation with a single into centerfield to drive in Lewis to tie the game at one.

A single by Case Hannum and a walk to A'Darius Council loaded the bases. Mike Bessell promptly cleared the bases with a three-run double into

centerfield to put the Panthers up 4-1.

Lincoln Land inched closer to the Panthers when a two-out error led to a run on a double by Bryce Torricelli to make the score 4-2 after three innings.

South Florida plated four more runs in the bottom of the fourth, led by singles by Leo Alfonzo and Asman and highlighted by a two-run triple by P.J. Cimo as the Panthers increased their lead to six runs at 8-2 after four innings.

South Florida unloaded on the Loggers in the bottom of the fifth for seven runs after they loaded the bases with one out after Bessell was hit by a pitch and singles by Carter Dahl

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PHOTO BY JIM TAYLOR/CORRESPONDENT

SFSC left fielder Casey Asman leaps to make a catch during Sunday's win over Lincoln Land.

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and Alfonzo.

Pierson was hit by another pitch to force in Bessell from third to put SFSC up 9-2. A passed ball brought in Dahl, while advancing Alfonzo and Bessell to third and second respectively as the Panthers now led 10-2.

A walk to Zeddrick Burnham loaded the bases and P.J. Cimo followed with a single into right field to drive in two runs to make the score 12-2.

Another run came in on an error by the Logger catcher in a pick-off attempt as the Panther lead increased to 13-2. A triple by Asman and a sacrifice fly by Hannum each drove in a run as South Florida led 15-2 lead.

The Loggers added two runs in the seventh inning to make the final



PHOTO BY JIM TAYLOR/CORRESPONDENT

South Florida second baseman Case Hannum gets the force out and looks to turn a double play during Sunday's game against Lincoln Land.

score 15-4.

Asman slugged four of the Panthers 12 hits for the game while Cimo and Alfonzo each had two. Cimo also batted in four runs while Bessell had three in the win.

Lewis started the game and pitched four innings, giving up two runs (one earned) on six hits for the win.

Hunter Morales pitched

three innings in relief, giving up two runs on five hits and Dawson Young closed out the game with two scoreless and hitless innings for the Panthers.

South Florida starts Suncoast Conference play this week, hosting Hillsborough Community College on today and Friday. Both home games have a 6 p.m. start.

Four SFSC students named to 2019 All-Florida Academic Team

SPECIAL TO HIGHLANDS SUN

AVON PARK — The Florida College System (FCS) has named four South Florida State College (SFSC) students to the 2019 All-Florida Academic Team.

Each year, the FCS names an All-Florida Academic Team to honor students enrolled in Florida's public state and community colleges for their academic achievement, leadership, and service to the community.

The SFSC students earning this recognition are Jami Mercer, Aspen Rowe, Dafne Dominguez Sanchez and Kristal Shands. They join 158 of their peers from the 28-member FCS in being named to the academic team.

The four SFSC students will be recognized, formally, at an awards ceremony on Thursday, April 4 in Orlando. Additional honors and scholarships for these students, awarded by Phi Theta Kappa (PTK), the Coca-Cola Scholars Foundation, and other affiliated foundations and organizations, will be announced at that time.

"We are so pleased with the academic accomplishments of these four scholars from the Tau Epsilon Chapter of PTK at SFSC," said Dr. Charlotte Pressler, PTK advisor and Honors Program director at SFSC. "Each of these students has unique accomplishments that are the result of dedication to academic pursuits. Being named as an All-Florida Academic Team member is both an honor and a wonderful way to recognize and celebrate academic

excellence at SFSC. We are so proud of them!"

Students named to the All-Florida Academic Team were drawn from SFSC's Honors Program and the College's Tau Epsilon chapter of PTK. In nominating students for the All-Florida Academic Team, colleges consider participation in academic honors programs, membership in and awards from collegiate societies, and academic enrichment gained from internships and special projects.

PTK is an honor society that recognizes the academic achievements of community and state college students and helps them to grow as scholars and leaders. The society is

made up of over 3.5 million members and nearly 1,300 chapters in nine nations. For more on PTK, visit ptk.org.

For more information about SFSC's PTK chapter or Honors Program, contact Dr. Pressler at 863-784-7247.



COURTESY PHOTO

The SFSC students earning a spot on the 2019 All-Florida Academic Team are Jami Mercer, Aspen Rowe, Dafne Dominguez Sanchez and Kristal Shands.

SFSC Dental Programs Earn Accreditation

South Florida State College's dental hygiene and assisting programs recently were granted continuing accreditation from the Commission on Dental Accreditation.

Accreditation has been granted for seven years, through 2025.

The Dental Hygiene program launched in 2002 and was initially granted accreditation in January 2005. The Dental Assisting program began in 2003 and was accredited in July 2004.

This accreditation is a result of a three-day visit to SFSC in June 2018 by four CODA site visitors. CODA is nationally recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as the sole agency to accredit dental education programs conducted at the postsecondary level.

"This is the first time both programs have been reviewed during the same visit," said Dr. Michele Heston, dean of health sciences at SFSC. "The site visitors presented their results

and were pleased to state that there were no findings (issues). They praised the program chair, the faculty, and the college's support of the program, citing it was an 'excellent program with stellar facilities.'"

"SFSC's curriculum is as good as or better than any allied dental program in the country," said Dr. Deborah Milliken, chair of dental education at SFSC.

CODA considers a total of 12 standards and over 600 criteria for both dental programs. It assesses administration of the programs, financial support for the programs, curriculum, credentials of the faculty and their course loads, computer access, classroom setups for lectures, library resources, lab and clinic facilities, equipment, and entry-level competencies that students must pass.

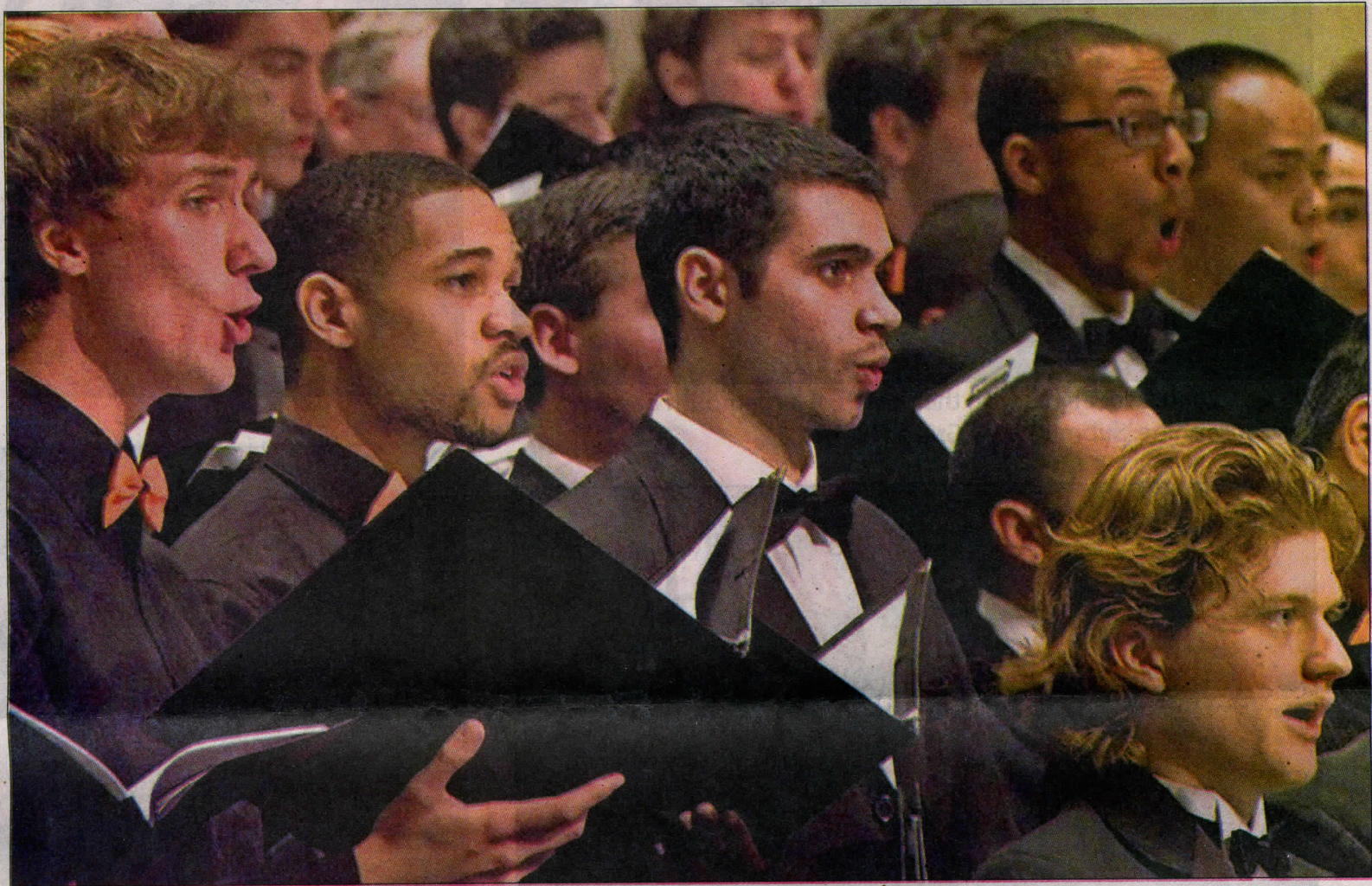
For more information about Health Science programs, call (863) 784-7027, email healthsciences@southflorida.edu, or visit southflorida.edu.



COURTESY PHOTO

An instructor views a Dental Hygiene student's work.

University of Florida Choir at SFSC



COURTESY PHOTO

The University of Florida Choir will perform at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts on Tuesday, March 26.

Special to Highlands News-Sun

The 60-member University of Florida Choir will perform its first concert on Tuesday, March 26 at 1:30 p.m. at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts on the Highlands Campus of South Florida State College (SFSC) in Avon Park. Conductor Dr. Will Kesling, who has served as the director of choral activities at the University of Florida for 16 years, has selected a program of spirituals and hymns from around the world and the Gospel Mass by Robert Ray.

Robert Ray's 30-minute Gospel Mass premiered in 1979 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The response from audiences was

wildly favorable. The joyful, toe-tapping music reflects African-American spirituals and jazz and the changes from the Second Vatican Council in the mid-60s. Ray composed the choral work in only two weeks.

"God controls everything I do," said Ray, a composer, conductor and music educator. "It was written in about a two-week period. The hard part for me was not being a formally trained composer. The creativity was a result of divine inspiration. He was working with me."

Under the direction of Dr. Kesling, with accompanist Tané Dekrey, the choir will begin with the "Kyrie" — Lord Have Mercy; then "Gloria" — Glory to God in the Highest; "Credo" — I

Believe in God; "Acclamation" — Hallelujah Praise the Lord; "Sanctus" — Holy, Holy Lord God of Hosts, and wrap up the first half of the concert with "Agnus Dei" — Lamb of God.

Dr. Will Kesling has conducted hundreds of choral ensembles and 46 professional symphony orchestras throughout the world. His talents for weaving together text and music, chorus and orchestra have garnered him international respect. Dr. Kesling has conducted a number of engagements in Carnegie Hall and the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, as well as in major concert halls internationally. He served as the associate conductor of the Manhattan Philharmonic

Orchestra in New York City; as the principal guest conductor of the St. Petersburg State Symphony Orchestra in Russia; and was the music director and conductor of the Mountain West Symphony Orchestra in Utah for 18 years.

"This is a beautiful performance during this season of Lent," said Cindy Garren, director of cultural programs at SFSC. "We invite all the Gators in Highlands County to come out to support these students."

Tickets are \$12, \$15, and \$18. Groups of 12 or more can save 25 percent on ticket prices plus receive a free ticket for the group leader. The Matinee

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Series is sponsored by the Palms of Sebring and Lampe & Kiefer Hearing Aid Centers. Videos and information are available online at sfscARTS.org. Tickets can be purchased

online, by phone at 863-784-7178, or by visiting the box office located at 600 West College Drive in Avon Park.

About South Florida State College Performing Arts

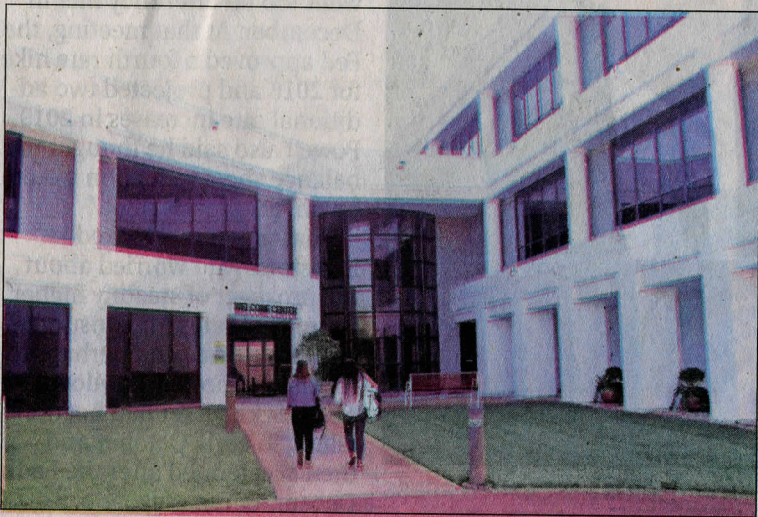
South Florida State College (SFSC) presents more than 35 nationally

and internationally touring artists at the 1,460-seat Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts and the 250-seat SFSC University Center located on the Highlands Campus at 600 West College Drive in

Avon Park. SFSC offers a Matinee Series for adults at leisure, Young People's Theater Series for school performances, a Jazz Series, a Trending Now Series of contemporary, family shows, and the popular Artist Series.

Group rates and subscriptions are available online and at the box office. Upcoming performances include: Chita Rivera and Robert Klein – March 27; jazz vocalist Nicole Henry – March 28; and The Price is Right Live – March 30.

Florida TaxWatch releases FCS assessment



FILE PHOTO

Florida TaxWatch recently released its independent assessment of the economic impacts of the Florida College System.

SPECIAL TO HIGHLANDS NEWS-SUN

TALLAHASSEE — The Florida TaxWatch, an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit taxpayer research institute and government watchdog announced at a press conference the results of their independent assessment of the economic impacts of the Florida College System.

The research performed by the Florida TaxWatch, alongside economist Richard Harper, Ph.D, shows that the Florida College System provides a significant return on the State's investment, increases expected work-life earnings for students, and compares favorably to

colleges nationally in terms of enrollment and graduation rates.

The assessment highlights that the return on investment for students is significant. Students experience increased expected work-life earnings of \$491,777 to \$838,023 and a repayment of total cost time of only 2.5 to 3.8 years.

In addition, the higher work-life salaries earned by degree holders compared to high-school completers compared with the public investment in the system translates to a return of \$10.80 to \$15.42 in increased Florida Gross Domestic Product for every \$1 invested and generates nearly

10,000 new jobs.

"The TaxWatch report highlights the value provided by the Florida College System given the corresponding high return on investment," said Dr. Thomas Leitzel, president of South Florida State College (SFSC). "The report confirms that students, upon graduation, enter jobs that provide high wages and salaries.

"SFSC Associate in Science degree recipients earn more than \$56,000 on average in their first year of work following graduation, placing SFSC as the top college in the state for this criteria," he said. "We're thrilled

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to see SFSC graduates contributing to Florida's economy in a meaningful way, plus they remain in Florida and as a result of their academic success, they enjoy a high degree of professional and personal satisfaction."

"A great many of our university graduates started at a community college, myself included," said Florida TaxWatch president and CEO Dominic M. Calabro. "Florida's College System has provided an opportunity for generations of Floridians to have a better life, and the return on the State's taxpayers' investment has been significant.

"To make Florida No. 1 in the United States for workforce education, we must continue to invest in these worthy institutions," Calabro said.

The announcement was presented alongside Rep. Toby Overdorf and Sen. Anitere Flores.

"There are thousands of job openings in Florida because businesses cannot find employees with the set of skills they are looking for," said Overdorf. "Thanks to the excellent research from

Florida TaxWatch, we can see that the Florida College System is a national leader compared to other state systems and continues to be a good investment for the State."

Overdorf was joined by Helios Education Foundation, Florida TaxWatch, and several partners that are helping shape Florida's economic growth, workforce development, and higher education.

"The findings by Florida TaxWatch should be of particular importance to Florida stakeholders and policymakers because they reinforce why the State's investment into the Florida College System is important not only to current students but to Florida's future workforce," said Charles Hokanson, senior vice president, Florida Community Engagement at Helios Education Foundation.

"The Foundation's mission is to ensure more students, particularly first-generation, minority, and underrepresented students, complete a post-secondary degree," Hokanson said. "This assessment illustrates the value Florida colleges bring to that mission, and to the prosperity of our state."