



The graduates recite the traditional Nightingale Pledge.

COURTESY PHOTO

## SFSC Associate in Science In Nursing Graduates Honored in Pinning Ceremony

Special To The Herald-Advocate

South Florida State College (SFSC) honored 37 Associate in Science in Nursing (ADN) students in a traditional pinning ceremony on Thursday, May 11 in the Alan J. Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts at SFSC on the Highlands Campus in Avon Park.

Hardee County graduates included: Isabella Adams, Jackeline De La Cruz, Margarita Gutierrez, Nubia Hernandez, Cristina Lopez-Rojas, Veronica Ramos, Berenice Roblero, Johnny Saldivar, and Candice Story.

Guest speaker for the ceremony was Rasheena Morris-James, SFSC Nursing instructor and nurse practitioner.

"Remember that your degree is more than a piece of paper. It's a symbol of your commitment to learning, growth, and personal development," Morris-James said. "It's a testament to your resilience and determination in the face of adversity. And it's the foundation on which you will build a fulfilling and meaningful life. Being a nurse means being a patient advocate. You will be the voice for your patient and ensure that they receive the highest possible quality care. Being a nurse is about being a leader and a lifelong learner. Learn to work effectively as part of a team and ask for help if you need it. You will be amazed at what you can accomplish

when you work together. You have worked so hard, you have persevered and shown that you have what it takes to become an exceptional nurse."

Each year, Nursing graduates award the Golden D.U.C.K. to someone who has served as a mentor to the students in the program. The D.U.C.K. acronym represents the foundational elements of the mentoring arrangement: Developing, Understanding, Compassion, and Knowledge. During the ceremony, graduate Ashley Lehman presented the 2023 Golden D.U.C.K. Award to Nursing instructor Mary Ellen Powrie. This is the second time Powrie has been bestowed this award.

"Her passion for nursing and education flows through every ounce of who she is," Lehman said. "She is a strong advocate, reminding us that we matter and to never be afraid to use our voice. If we were ever having a bad day, she always knew the right words to put us at ease. She didn't want us to just survive nursing school, she wanted us to thrive in nursing school."

During the ceremony, the graduates' loved ones presented them with their individual nursing pins. The graduates, then, passed the flame of a lamp, one to another, before reciting the Nightingale Pledge.

The pinning ceremony originated in the 1850s at the Nightingale School of Nursing at St. Thomas Hospital in Lon-

don. Having been awarded the Red Cross of St. George for her selfless service to the injured and dying during the Crimean War, Florence Nightingale chose to extend this offer to her most outstanding graduating nurses by presenting each of them with a medal of excellence. The presentation of the lamp is a symbol of the caring devotion nurses administer to the sick and injured in the practice of nursing. After nurses were pinned, Nightingale would light a lamp and pass the flame to each nurse as they recited the pledge. The passing of the flame represents a formal welcoming of new nurses to the profession.

Graduates of the ADN program become registered nurses by passing the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) exam. SFSC Nursing graduates are usually fully employed in nursing within a few months of graduation.

SFSC offers an online Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), a two-year generic Associate in Science in Nursing, a 13-month transition licensed practical nurse to registered nurse Associate in Science in Nursing, and an 11-month Practical Nursing (PN) Career Certificate. For information about SFSC's Nursing programs, contact Danielle Ochoa, Health Sciences advisor, at 863-784-7027 or by email at [healthsciences@southflorida.edu](mailto:healthsciences@southflorida.edu).



Nursing graduate Ashley Lehman (left) presents Nursing Instructor Mary Ellen Powrie with the Golden D.U.C.K. Award.



Nursing student Cristina Lopez-Rojas (right) was pinned by her father Alejandro Lopez.

Bob Elliott's

Fort Meade, Florida  
205 N. Charleston



COURTESY PHOTO

**Dental Hygiene graduates (from left): Maritza Banda, David Moises Fernandez-Castanon, Jeanette Contreras, Nakisha Whetton, Kindall Aynnalee Patton, Kimberly Wright, Chenoa Bond, Maria Tirado, Danielle Barnhill, Cyntia Olvera, Baylea Dery, Ashley Tufts, and Ivy Main.**

## SFSC Dental Hygiene Graduates Honored With Pinning Ceremony

Special To The Herald-Advocate

South Florida State College (SFSC) honored graduates of its Dental Hygiene program in a traditional pinning ceremony in the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts on the Highlands Campus in Avon Park on Thursday, May 4. The graduates had just completed their Associate in Science in Dental Hygiene.

Receiving their pins were Maritza Banda, Danielle Lyn Barnhill, Chenoa Grace Bond, Jeanette Contreras, Baylea N. Dery, David Moises Fernandez-Castanon, Ivy G. Main, Cyntia G. Olvera, Kindall Aynnalee Patton, Maria Tirado, Ashley Elizabeth Tufts, Nak-

isha M. Whetton, and Kimberly M. Wright.

Dr. Michele Heston, SFSC vice president for academic affairs and student services, welcomed the Dental Hygiene graduates and offered words of wisdom.

"No exercise is better for the human heart than reaching down and lifting someone else up, to serve others, and to enrich your community," she said. "This truly defines a successful life, for success is personal and it is charitable and it is the sum, not of our possessions, but of how we helped others."

Graduates were presented their dental hygiene pins by Dr. Deborah Milliken, chair of SFSC's Dental Education program.

Addressing the graduates, Milliken offered

parting words of advice: "The faculty is so proud of you and the work you've accomplished. It is my task to leave you with things to consider about where to go from here.

"Don't forget about yourself," she said. "This is a time that will never come again. The choices you make will have an impact on where you go from here. As you're exploring your options for employment, understand the people you're trying to connect with. Be aware of the people around you. They're looking to you for guidance, help, support, friendship, and care, even on your bad days. As you're re-entering a community that you've probably neglected for the last few years, invest in your community where people need you. Look for opportunities to be there for others who can benefit from your

presented to Ashley Tufts for demonstrating remarkable skill and talent over the course of her classes. The Colgate Student Total Achievement Recognition (STAR) Award was presented to Chenoa Bond for showing excellence and commitment to the Dental Hygiene profession. The Community Award was presented to Baylea Dery for her special interest/achievement in community dentistry and dental public health. The Outstanding Student Award was presented to Cyntia Olvera.

Upon completing the Dental Hygiene program, graduates become dental hygienists by passing the National Dental Hygiene Board Examination and the Florida State Clinical Licensure Examination. They can, then, work alongside a dentist as a member of a dental





Ten students graduated from Basic Law Enforcement Academy and Cross Over to Basic Law Enforcement Academy on June 8, 2023, at the SFSC Highlands Campus

## WPD Sergeant Gives Keynote Address At Academy Graduation



COURTESY PHOTOS/SFSC

Sabrina Valero, leader of Basic Law Enforcement Academy 270, receives an award for having the highest firearms score from SFSC Criminal Justice Programs Coordinator Joseph Marble.



Jackson Roberson receives the award for having the highest academic score in Basic Law Enforcement Academy 270 from SFSC Criminal Justice Programs Coordinator Joseph Marble.

Special To The Herald-Advocate

During a ceremony on Thursday, June 8, on South Florida State College's (SFSC) Highlands Campus, the Basic Law Enforcement Academy Class 270 graduated seven cadets and the Cross Over to Basic Law Enforcement Class 364 graduated two cadets.

Basic Law Enforcement cadets who received Career Certificates were: Francisco Jimenez, Jeffrey Johnson, Patrick Ratterree, Jamey Rivera, Jackson Roberson, Griselda Sanchez, Ethan Schroeder, and Sabrina Valero.

Crossover Academy Class 364 graduates who received Career Certificates were: Ty Davis and Adrian Perdue.

During the ceremony, Valero received the award for achieving the top firearms score and was recognized for

serving as class leader. Roberson received the award for attaining the highest academic score in the class.

The guest speaker was Sergeant Robert Spencer of the Wauchula Police Department. He told the new graduates to remember their principles as they set out to serve the public.

"The difference you make does not have to be huge or witnessed by many," Spencer said. "In fact, at times, for law enforcement officers, the difference we make may be small or go unnoticed but I promise it will make an impact on someone's life. Every day there will be new challenges and new opportunities. Take those challenges and opportunities and grow from the experiences."

Added Spencer: "As an officer we're entrusted to serve the public and enforce laws, not to be above them. Know that you're entrusted with great authority. Don't abuse that authority. Don't think you're above anyone else because of that authority. Be proud of who you are, but don't forget the principles for

which you stand."

SFSC's Basic Law Enforcement Career Certificate program trains students to become law enforcement officers in Florida. By successfully completing the program, they are eligible to take the state certification examination to become certified law enforcement officers. The program runs 770 contact hours or approximately five months full-time or approximately 10 months part-time.

The Correction to Law Enforcement (Crossover) Career Certificate program trains currently employed corrections officers to become law enforcement officers in Florida. Upon successful completion of the program, graduates are eligible to take the state certification examination to become certified law enforcement officers. The program runs 515 contact hours or approximately 10 months part-time.

For information about these programs, visit southflorida.edu or call SFSC's Criminal Justice Academy at 863-784-7285.

**NOTICE OF REGULAR MEETING**  
**HARDEE COUNTY INDIGENT HEALTH CARE BOARD**

The Hardee County Indigent Health Care Board will hold a **REGULAR MEETING** Tuesday June 20, 2023, at 5:30 PM.

The meeting will take place in the Hardee County Board of County Commissioners Board Room, 412 W. Orange St., Suite 102, Wauchula, Florida.

6:15c



# Getting their game on

6.28.23



MARC VALERO/STAFF

Boys & Girls Club students play an education trivia game call "Pete's Trivia."

## Boys & Girls Club playfully learn about college

By **MARC VALERO**  
STAFF WRITER

South Florida State College staff and students teamed up with Boys and Girls Club of Highlands County on Monday for the Strive for Success to College event.

The students were from both the Avon Park and Sebring locations of the Boys & Girls Club of Highlands County, with the event being held at the club's Avon Park location.

SFSC recruiter Sofia Ochoa explained the purpose of the event is to help students be more aware of what is available for them and to remind them how important their education is. She said the importance of education grows as they move forward from elementary school all the way to high school and possibly one day going to college.

"With SFSC being the local college, we want to make sure that they know who we are and where we are located as well as all the opportunities we have available," she said. Also, to help them get familiar with college and education terminology that they well know as they get further up in their grade levels."

Ochoa and nine facilitators from SFSC and three from the Boys & Girls Club kept the kids busy with popular



MARC VALERO/STAFF

South Florida State College recruiter Sonia Ochoa points out the next game station to students at the Avon Park Boys & Girls Club.

games with a twist that were tied to education and college terms.

One of the games was called "SFSC Edition Pictionary" where two teams battled it out drawing careers that are offered at SFSC.

"Pete's Trivia" was similar to Jeopardy with topics about college, education and roads to success that gives them different trivia questions, Ochoa said. "Math & the Furious" is a mathematical game with a little bit of an obstacle course to do the math equations.

Boys & Girls Club Sebring Site Director Vernetta Bolton said the event



MARC VALERO/STAFF

It's "Building Blocks to Education", a Jenga game utilized for the Strive for Success to College event at the Avon Park Boys & Girls Club.

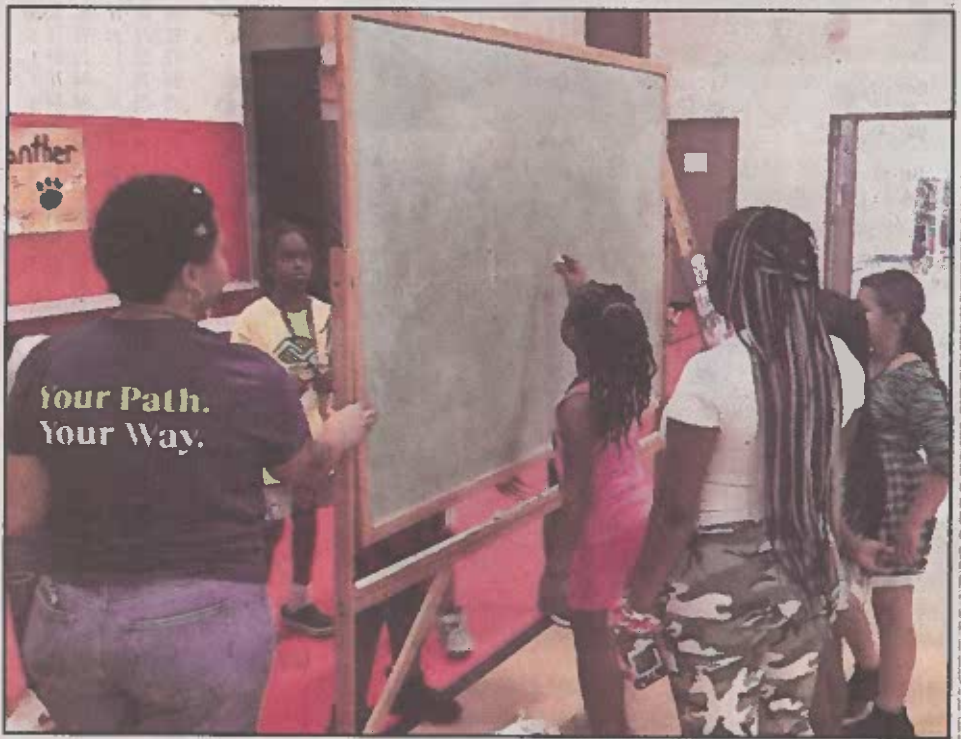
# CLUB

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was held last year and is a good opportunity for the students to do different activities and learn and meet new people.

Avon Park Site Director Florine Anderson-Wells said the students from Avon Park and Sebring can coordinate together as a group in a good setting. The college is there to give them some hope.

On June 21, students turned out in Building B on the Highlands Campus to create spirit posters for the Strive for Success to College event at the Boys & Girls Club of Highlands County. The program goes to the Boys & Girls Club of DeSoto County on July 12.



MARC VALERO/STAFF

The South Florida State College edition of Pictionary at the Avon Park Boys & Girls Club.



# HIGHLANDS NEWS-SUN

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YOUR HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER SINCE 1919

An Edition Of The Sun

## A fond farewell President Leitzel lauded for service to SFSC

By **MARC VALERO**  
STAFF WRITER

It was a long goodbye to South Florida State College President Thomas Leitzel at his final meeting on Wednesday in Avon Park with the college's District Board of Trustees.

Board Chair Terry Atchley said they have a contentious issue that they have to work out with some sort of resolution,

that issue is if they are willing to accept the resignation of Dr. Thomas Leitzel.

"I have not felt a unanimous decision amongst the Board of Trustees yet, so I am going to open the floor for discussion on whether we want to accept this particular resignation or not," Atchley said.

Kris Ryder said there is no reason that they should accept his resignation, but he is "chomping

on the bit" to get on a boat on the intercoastal waterway so she would have to vote "yes" to accept his resignation.

"We love him and we send him off with a lot of appreciation," Ryder said.

Tami Cullens said it is like when you have children and they ask the same question over and over and you reply "no"



MARC VALERO/STAFF

South Florida State College Board of Trustees, from left, Attorney Pamela Karlson, Board of Trustees Vice Chair Timothy D. Backer, Board Member Louis Kirschner, SFSC President Dr. Thomas Leitzel, Board Chair Terry Atchley and Board Members Kris Rider, Tami Cullens and Derren Bryan present Leitzel with a framed resolution on Wednesday recognizing his service to the college. The Board regretfully accepted his resignation to retire.

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## LETIZEL

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every time. "No, that is all I am going to say."

Derren Bryan joked that he would vote "yes" for the Leitzel's retirement if it meant that the presidential reports would be less than two hours.

Bryan then offered "well wishes" on Leitzel's retirement.

Louis Kirschner said he didn't know of anyone who has worked as hard as Leitzel.

Kirschner said he would reluctantly vote "yes" for Leitzel's retirement.

Timothy Backer said Leitzel was an outstanding president and he deserves his retirement.

Atchley read from a framed resolution he presented to Leitzel: "Regretfully accepting the decision of Dr. Thomas C. Leitzel to retire. Recognizing the gratitude and many years to devoted service to South Florida State College.

Whereas, Tom began working at South Florida State College as president on July 1, 2013, and held that position over the next 10 years. Whereas, in addition to his duties, Tom has collaborated with



LETIZEL

many dedicated individuals.

"The college experienced enrollment growth. It began new academic programs and increased the size of the Foundation's unrestricted endowment. In addition, creating a new vision statement. South Florida State College has been recognized as a top 25 Aspen semifinalist and has received its 10-year reaffirmation accreditation.

"Whereas, dependability, loyalty and talent have made Tom not only a valuable employee, but a wonderful friend to all."

The resolution called for Leitzel to enjoy every minute of his

retirement.

Leitzel said, "It has just been a joy and a pleasure. I am thrilled and I appreciate everyone for what they have done."

Atchley announced that the District Board of Trustees has conferred upon Dr. Thomas C. Leitzel the title of President Emeritus.

Leitzel gave his final president's report, which started with a sound clip of the Edward Bear song "Last Song."

"This is tough," he said. "This is my 104th report."

Leitzel suggested a few initiatives/priorities for the Board and college:

- Create a new website presence.

- Fund the SFSC Center for Applied Research.

- Upgrade campus security.

- Embrace AI & VR (Artificial Intelligence & Virtual Reality).

- Construction Items:

- Fuschetti Park/Saxon Field House.

- Student Residence Halls.

- Regional Conference Center.

Leitzel's closing thoughts to the Board of Trustees:

- The student is the customer (emphasize the student

experience).

- Every classroom is a precious sanctuary. The beauty and freedom of intellectual exchange changes lives.

- This organization is grounded in service to students. Maintain the student-centered mindset and touchpoints.

- Allow the curriculum to preserve culture. After all, the curriculum is the college's product. (It's what the college sells).

"It's a calling," Leitzel said. "We are called to make a difference — for our students and for our community."

At the time of his retirement, Leitzel will have served the higher education profession for 45 years, with service at seven institutions in six states. He quickly credits his experience in the state of Florida and with the Florida College System as the pinnacle of his service. He was the fourth president of SFSC, succeeding presidents Norman L. Stephens, Catherine P. Cornelius, and William Stallard.

Upon retirement and after several planned trips, Leitzel plans to remain in Florida and likely stay active in the higher education community by researching, writing, and publishing.



From left are Jamie Bateman, Rotary president Tanya Royal, and foundation coordinator Anastia Fuchser.

PHOTO BY JIM KELLY

## South Florida State College Foundation Speaks To Rotary

**By JIM KELLY**  
Of The Herald-Advocate

Jamie Bateman, vice president of South Florida State College Foundation, spoke to the Rotary Club of Hardee County earlier this year at the Java Cafe.

SFSC serves Highlands,

Hardee and DeSoto counties, and 31 percent of the enrollment are first-generation students.

SFSC has a Quality Enhancement Program, offers culinary degrees through chef Paul Riso at the Hotel Jacaranda, has an electric lineman program at the

Hardee campus, teaches construction trades which include an OSHA industry safety course, a four-week CDL (commercial driver's license) program, and a two-year nurses program among many other courses.