

SFSC commencement ceremony set for today

Highlands Today staff report

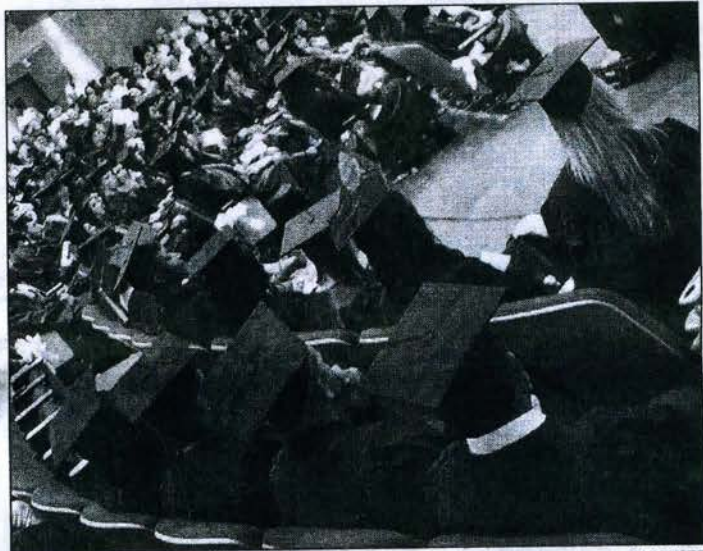
AVON PARK — South Florida State College will close out its 50th anniversary year with a commencement ceremony today at 6:45 p.m. at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts.

The commencement speaker is Martile Blackman, who earned her Bachelor of Applied Science in Supervision and Management degree. She graduated from SFSC in December 2013 with her Associate in Arts degree.

Approximately 202 students will have met the SFSC graduation requirements. Of these, 109 receive associate degrees, 57 receive vocational certificates or college credit certificates, 15 will be graduates of the Adult Education program and 21 will receive Bachelor of Applied Science degrees in supervision and management.

Participating in the ceremony will be 92 students.

Live online streaming, accessed by clicking a website banner at www.southflorida.edu, will allow friends and relatives to see everything from the



FILE PHOTO

South Florida State College will hold its fall commencement ceremony today at 6:45 p.m. at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts. A live stream can be accessed online at the college's website, www.southflorida.edu.

processional to the last graduate crossing the stage. The stream begins at 6:30 p.m.

Mace bearer and chief marshal is Elizabeth Andrews, and marshals are Davida Austin, Thomas Bush, Kathleen Cappo, Dr. Cate Cover, Robert Hamp-

ton, Dr. Theresa James, Melanie Jackson, Claire Miller and Lena Phelps.

A reception will be held in the Catherine P. Cornelius Student Services and Classroom Complex (Building B) immediately following commencement.

Academy graduates 8 new corrections officers

SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-SUN

AVON PARK — South Florida State College graduated eight new correctional officers on Dec. 7. Guest speaker for the ceremony was Michael Braswell, a deputy with the Polk County Sheriff's Department.

Michael Austin, coordinator of SFSC's Criminal Justice Academy, called up the eight to the SFSC University Center Auditorium stage and handed each new officer a diploma. Those receiving a diploma were class leader Ashley Kazlauskas, Michael D. Bowers, Sheila Brutus, Andrew L. Jackson, Diamond L. Madrid, Tamara Walker, Sebastian T. Wells, and Cynthia J. Zwer.

Brutus earned the top honors for academic excellence, and Zwer scored the firearms award



Courtesy photo

New correctional officers Diamond Madrid (from left), Andrew Jackson, Sebastian Wells, Ashley Kazlauskas, Cynthia Zwer, Sheila Brutus, Michael Bowers, and Tamara Walker.

for her work on the shooting range.

"These cadets were a group of professionals," said Austin. "They endured extreme conditions and circumstances to complete this training program.

Some were parents, and they all had to commute a great distance to get to classes on time every day. I am confident they could all have promising careers in the criminal justice field if they chose to do so."



Courtesy photo

Heartland Games event coordinators and South Florida State College staff (from left) Julio Seda (racquetball), Gary Sorko (shuffleboard), Pat Reich (bridge), Evelyn Humphrey (euchre), Earl Maslin (tennis), and Tom Stadler (pickleball).

Registration now open for 2016 Heartland Games for Active Adults

SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-SUN

SEBRING - South Florida State College is pleased to announce that registration forms are now available on line at www.southflorida.edu/heartlandgames. Residents of Highlands, Hardee and DeSoto counties are encouraged to look over the various events offered and participate.

This year's Games include Bowling, Bridge, Cycling, Euchre, Golf, Indoor Volleyball, Pickleball, Racquetball, Shuffleboard, Swimming, Tai Chi, Tennis and Track and Field.

The Games will be held from Jan 23 through the end of March. The 2016 Games are being sponsored by Edward Jones/Alan Holmes, Newsom Eye, Florida

Hospital, Drs. Thakkar & Patel, Legacy Bicycles, Turner Furniture and Wauchula State Bank.

Following a meeting of several of the Games coordinators, it was announced that the 2016 entry fee has been reduced to \$15 for a single event or \$25 to participate in multiple events. The entry fee includes a dri-fit shirt, medals (awarded by age and gender) and lunch at the following events (Bridge, Euchre, Pickleball, Shuffleboard and Tennis). There is a surcharge for Bowling and Golf.

Judy Granger, a full-time resident of Sun n Lake for seven years, has participated in the Games before and encourages others to do as she has and sign up for more than one event.

Granger loves to cycle so will be heading out on the Balboa course at Sun 'N Lake on Feb. 20. On March 5 she'll be found at Pinecrest Golf Club in the Heartland Games Golf Tournament. On March 12 and 13 you'll see Granger at the Sun 'N Lake Racquet Club playing in the Pickleball Tournament. She has won medals in the pool in past years, noting that there weren't always other competitors in her 60- to 64-year-old age group. She hopes that others will take up the challenge and jump in the YMCA pool with her on March 22.

Registration forms and payment must be received at South Florida State College at least two weeks prior to the first event in which an individual is entered.

Long journey to degree for Blackman

Speaker for SFSC graduation completes 34-year journey

SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-SUN

AVON PARK — When Martile Blackman receives her bachelor's degree during South Florida State College's Commencement ceremony on Dec. 17, she will have completed a quest 34 years in the making.

Blackman will be one of 202 graduates — 92 of which are taking part in the ceremony at 6:45 p.m. at the Wildstein Theatre for the Performing Arts. Blackman is one of 21 students who will receive a bachelor of applied science degree. The ceremony will wrap up the college's 50th anniversary year.

After finishing high school in 1981, Blackman, a native of Hattiesburg, Miss., moved to Highlands County. In the fall of that year, she enrolled at SFSC. After completing her freshman-year course work, she took a break from college to start a family, with plans to resume her studies once the kids were in school themselves.

But the demands of raising five children — who range in age from 19 to 31 — kept tugging away at her time. Now with all the children out of the nest, the 52-year-old Blackman will finally graduate from SFSC's bachelor's in applied science in supervision and management program.

The Sebring resident will not only pick up her degree, she will also deliver the student commencement speech, giving Blackman an opportunity to tell her classmates and guests about a three-decades long journey that brought her back to SFSC.

"Giving this speech is a tremendous honor for me," said Blackman. "I've put a lot of thought into what I am going say

because this is an honor I don't take lightly."

What prodded Blackman's return to college? With only one child still at home in 2012, she decided her own education could wait no longer. She returned to SFSC to complete the associate degree she started in 1981.

"To my surprise and favor, the credits I earned during my freshman year carried forward, so it took me only one year to get my associate degree," said Blackman. "Just as I wrapped that up, SFSC was one year into getting its new bachelor's degree program in supervision and management going, so I decided to continue on toward a four-year degree."

Blackman noted choosing a business degree was a good match for her. During her years as a full-time mother and homemaker, she had a hand in helping run a series of family businesses that included restaurants and commercial properties.

Reflecting on her decision to pursue a degree at SFSC, Blackman said she made the right choice. "The classes were small and help was always available when I needed it, including math and writing tutoring labs"

Still, Blackman said she encountered hurdles. "Mastering some of the computer-related work came a bit harder for me than for some of the younger students," she said. "Usually, I was the oldest student in the class," Blackman said amid chuckles. "Older even than most of the professors."

Blackman's age didn't dampen her zeal to succeed. She was active in SFSC's chapter of Phi Beta Lambda, the national organization for students studying business. In



Courtesy photo

Martile Blackman will give the commencement speech during the South Florida State winter graduation ceremony Saturday.

her senior year, she competed against students nationwide, reaching PBL's national competition this summer. Blackman brought home trophies in client services, sales presentation, and project management.

"My senior year was special to me," said Blackman. "My youngest daughter was starting her freshman year in college, and I was wrapping up my senior year winning at a national competition."

What plans does Blackman have once she has her degree in hand? "I haven't charted out exactly what I am going to do," she said. "I am definitely going to work but leave some room so that I devote time to a cherished interest, the Highlands Little Theatre." Blackman

has a long association with the Sebring-based theatrical production group, starring in several of its productions.

Blackman said her children — Brittany, Brooke, Molly, Timothy and Alexandra — can't make it to the ceremony, but, along with the public, they can watch it online. SFSC will live stream the graduation exercise on its website: www.southflorida.edu.

As the ceremony draws near, Blackman is getting help on crafting her speech from SFSC graduation team members. She won't reveal what she'll tell the audience, estimated to number near 1,500, but knows what impression she wants to make on them.

"I want to leave the students and guests feeling a sense of encouragement," said Blackman.

SFSC comes up short in governor's proposed budget

College is hopeful
for increase from
Legislature

BY MARC VALERO
Highlands Today

AVON PARK — South Florida State College's slice of Gov. Rick Scott's proposed education budget is a little smaller than last year, so the SFSC administration is looking to the Legislature for improved funding.

SFSC Vice President of Ad-

ministrative Services Glenn Little noted that with the Legislative session starting earlier, Scott's proposed budget came out earlier than in previous years.

"We were disappointed in the governor's budget request of the Legislature for the Florida College System," Little said Tuesday.

The college system's council of presidents had requested an additional \$80 million to assist the colleges in meeting some of the governor's objectives, which included preparing students for

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RYAN PELHAM/STAFF

South Florida State College hopes the Legislature's budget for the college is more favorable than Gov. Rick Scott's proposal, which cuts it by about \$375,000.

SFSC

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work experiences, he said.

"We were hoping the governor's budget would include a substantial amount of money, if not \$80 million, at least some large portion of dollars that would be available to the Florida College System's institutions for workforce training and development and student service support to ensure that our students are getting employed at the highest levels possible," Little said.

But, the governor's overall proposed budget is only slightly higher compared with last year for the Florida College System, he said.

For the first time in the governor's proposed budget, however, the recommended funding levels for each college is listed, which showed South Flor-

ida State College with a reduction of about \$375,000, Little said.

Little noted this is the governor's recommended budget to the Legislature, which will approve a budget and set the level of funding SFSC will receive.

"We are working closely with the legislative bodies, which is what we always do, to make sure they understand our needs and all the great things that our Florida College System can do and will do in response to additional funding," he said.

Whatever increase the Legislature agrees on, SFSC hopes it will be distributed fairly among the institutions in the Florida College System, Little said.

Also, the college is looking to increase its student enrollment.

Last year, the college's enrollment increased by about 2 percent, which was one of the highest in-

creases in the state, Little noted. As the economy improves and more jobs are available, typically the college's enrollment doesn't grow.

But there are many people in the college's three-county area who can benefit from training and additional education, he said.

"So we have been pushing for enrollment growth," Little said. "We may not have an increase in enrollment this year ... but, we still might; we are waiting for our spring term numbers to come in."

Enrollment was down a little for the 2015 fall term, by about 1.5 percent compared with the 2014 fall term, he said.

The college is hoping for an upswing in enrollment as people become aware of the new and expanded programs, particularly in the workforce areas.

mvalero@highlandstoday.com
(863) 386-5826

SFSC News

SFSC students raise money for breast cancer

AVON PARK — South Florida State College's Student Government Association raised \$250 to help local residents get mammograms.

They raised the money during a fundraising drive in October in response to Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

The SGA officers presented the check Wednesday to Kristen Johnson, director of the Florida Hospital Foundation, when she visited SFSC's Highlands Campus.

"Early detection through mammograms saves lives," Johnson told the SGA officers who greeted her outside the student services building during a break for lunch.

Florida Hospital offers mammograms at its Heartland Breast Care Center in Sebring.

"Each year, the students raise money to support the fight against breast cancer," said Andy Polk, SFSC's coordinator of student life, who serves as an advisor to the SGA. He said this year the students decided to take a different approach.

"This time around, we wanted to keep it local and giving our donation to Florida Hospital means it will help people in SFSC's community," said Rebecca McKenzie, SGA president.

Breast Cancer Awareness Month, now in its 30th year, is an annual campaign to increase awareness of the disease.

After accepting the check, Johnson told the SGA officers the students' work was "pretty amazing." She said, "This check is nearly enough to cover mammograms for three patients and that makes a difference."

SFSC Foundation holds open house

AVON PARK — The South Florida State College Foundation kept the office doors open and the lights on after its usual closing time on Dec. 7. The staff didn't stay behind to catch up on work, but to show off to the public its newly renovated office space in the Hotel Jacaranda.

The SFSC Foundation, which has long occupied offices on the ground floor of the 89-year-old hotel, held an open house not just to showcase its new look but also to usher in a new phase in its mission to support SFSC.

"We've come a long way with the foundation, and I know we can go a lot further," said Jamie Bateman, SFSC's executive director for institutional advancement. She heads up the foundation that provides scholarships to students and funding for programs at the college's campuses in DeSoto, Hardee and Highlands counties.

"A fair number of folks know what we do, but there is so much more to tell," Bateman said. "So, we held an open house and brought the public in to learn more about how we help change the lives of our students."

The new look gives the office a brighter, more open feel, Bateman noted, as guests milled about the rooms with foundation staff on hand to point out what had changed and tell how the foundation supports SFSC and its students.

The SFSC Foundation just reached the midpoint of its \$10 million capital campaign, the Partnership Project. The five-year campaign aims to bolster the foundation's unrestricted endowment, giving SFSC a

stream revenue that will support new educational and applied research programs.

"There are so many amazing stories to tell about our students and how the scholarships we provide, and the educational program support we give to SFSC, make their success possible," said Bateman. "Our goal with the open house is to reintroduce the foundation to the community so that people get to know us better."

The Partnership Project got a boost in October with a major gift from local businessman Alan Jay Wildstein. SFSC renamed it theater complex the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing at SFSC to honor his donation.

The SFSC Foundation also serves as the local base for the statewide Take Stock in Children program. The program matches students at-risk of not completing high school with mentors who guide them toward earning their diplomas, with college scholarships awaiting those who graduate and go on to enroll in college.

Bateman timed the open house to coincide with the Avon Park Chamber of Commerce annual Christmas on Main Street celebration. After taking in a look at the renovated offices, guests stepped out the front door to hear students from Avon, Memorial and Park Elementary schools sing Christmas carols to a crowd that had assembled on the mall in front of the hotel.

Avon Park resident Joan Hartt, a foundation board member, showed guests around the hotel, pointing out the newly installed holiday decorations that adorn the Jacaranda's lobby and arcade.

SFSC Home Health Aide program debuts

Special to Highlands Today

AVON PARK — South Florida State College has launched a new occupational program to meet the health care industry's growing demand for home health aides, the college has announced.

The 165-hour course teaches students to provide in-home care to patients of licensed home health agencies.

The course, which will be taught over two terms, will teach students personal patient care, with an emphasis on caring for geriatric patients. Students will also learn about infection control, ethical responsibilities and emergency response.

Home health aides provide in-home care to people recuperating from surgery, limited by a chronic illness or suffering from dementia.

"Florida's population mix points to an increasing demand for home health aides," said Re-

becca Sroda, dean for health sciences. "As baby boomers age and retire to communities across the state, home health agencies will need to ramp up hiring."

The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects demand nationally for home health aides to grow 48 percent by 2022, much faster than the average for all occupations, the college said. Coupled with the region's already large population of adults 65 and older, Sroda said the new program will meet an industry need.

No state law mandates the licensing or certification of independent home health aides in Florida.

Nor does Florida require a state-administered test of home health aides. But the federal government requires home health agencies that receive Medicare or Medicaid reimbursement for patient care to ensure the home health aides they employ complete a training course.

With nearly two-thirds of Florida's home health agencies serving Medicare and Medicaid patients, Sroda said the new course will prepare students to transition into a job with any agency, regardless of the funding source.

The program, including tuition, fees and the screening will cost students \$542.

The course is open to students 18 and older who have a high school diploma or its equivalent.

Applicants must pass a background check that includes fingerprinting and a screening for drug use.

Before final acceptance, applicants will complete a physical examination and show proof of Hepatitis B vaccination.

To enroll in the home health occupational certificate program, call the SFSC Advising and Counseling Center at 784-7313 or email advising@southflorida.edu.



Sharon Weatherhead/Highlands Sun

The TAG artists: Betty Heim (from left), Bob Fishel, Betty McCarthy, Louise Weis, Kathleen Morgan, and Nancy Adams.

TAG hosts annual Holiday
Artists Reception, Art Sale

AVON PARK — The Artist's Group (TAG) at South Florida State College held its annual Holiday Artists Reception and Art Sale last Sunday at the Hotel Jacaranda in Avon Park. The TAG Studio is inside the historic arcade of the hotel.

TAG consists of a community of artists who are committed to developing their individual talents and promoting an appreciation for art. They meet, work, offer workshops and sell their artwork in the studio. They offer informal art classes throughout the year, too, and are geared toward artists of every skill level.

It was a festive afternoon where visitors could browse the spacious art gallery for beautiful and unique holiday gifts. Some of the work on display included artwork, jewelry, china, note cards and glass art.

TAG artists include Betty Heim, Bob Fishel, Betty McCarthy, Louise Weis, Kathleen Morgan and Nancy Adams. According to Fishel, they are all award-winning artists, sharing their passion and talents at TAG.

"I am a watercolor artist and I teach here at TAG," said Heim. "This is our annual artist show. We also showcase our students at their own show."

"I teach here and also teach privately for the Shriner's Club," said Fishel. "I'm from North Carolina and travel back and forth. My inspiration comes from a little of everything: mountains, beach, barns, boats and more."

Adams had her custom wine glasses, decorated with polymer clay, titled 'Drink with the Girls' on display. They were pretty and fun to enjoy at a ladies' happy hour.

A refreshment table with sandwiches, cheese and crackers and assorted desert snacks was available for all guests to enjoy.



Many beautiful creations were displayed and offered for sale inside the TAG Studio.



The arcade at the Hotel Jacaranda featured a reindeer pulling a sleigh loaded with Christmas gifts.



'Drinks with the Girls' made using polymer clay by Nancy Adams.

Sweet tea and cranberry punch were provided as well.

The TAG shop was dressed in its holiday best; beautiful art work to enjoy along with Christmas decorations. The arcade of the Hotel Jacaranda, where the TAG studio is located, had elegant and very beautiful decorations as well.

For more information on TAG or its art gallery call 863-784-7346 or e-mail tagstudioart@yahoo.com.



A wall of art creations by Betty McCarthy.

SFSC alumna writes her own plot in life

'SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-SUN

AVON PARK — Renia Carsillo always knew she wanted to be a writer. What she didn't know was the part South Florida State College would play in the plot.

Growing up poor in late 1980s Frostproof, Carsillo's family didn't entirely understand or support her desire to write. "My parents said, 'honey, you better have a backup plan,'" she said. "All the women in my family were nurses, so that was my family's thinking for me."

But Carsillo, now 32, craved a taste for a life of letters outside rural Florida.

Growing up on a small farm and her family's practical view of a woman's role whetted her appetite for more. So, Carsillo, a keen reader who was already academically well ahead of her peers during her junior year at Frostproof High School, jettisoned the notion of staying put for two more years.

"I figured out I could enroll in SFSC and



Courtesy photo

South Florida State College alumna Renia Carsillo is a three-time published author. Her fourth book, tentatively titled 'Raising Feminist Boys', is due for release in February.

study toward my high school diploma and associate degree at the same time," Carsillo said.

So, at age 17, Carsillo registered for high school and college credit classes at SFSC's Highlands Campus and moved into the student residence at the Hotel Jacaranda.

"My time at SFSC was amazing," Carsillo said. "I was involved in everything from editing the student newspaper, to taking honors English courses, to serving in the

student government association. I ruled on that campus!"

She credits former English professor Henry Bettich with inspiring her to pursue her dream of writing.

"Professor Bettich was a big influence during my two years at SFSC," Carsillo said. "He told me there was something special in my writing and pushed me to write more."

After picking up her high school diploma and associate degree at the same ceremony in 2002, Carsillo

moved to Tampa to study English at the University of South Florida.

"Coming from a rural area and a small college, it took me a year to adjust to USF," Carsillo said. "Still, I credit SFSC will preparing me academically and socially."

With her experience editing SFSC's student newspaper, the Panther Purr, Carsillo landed a spot on USF's student newspaper, giving her more time to hone her writing skills.

But after earning her bachelor's degree, Carsillo had trouble breaking into journalism at a time when newsrooms were downsizing. She drifted into banking, accepting a post with SunTrust Bank while she got her bearings.

With her writing career on hold, Carsillo took to life in the corporate world, rising from a branch officer to vice president, taking in a six-figure salary.

"I learned a lot in

banking. Including that money doesn't buy happiness," Carsillo said. "I busied myself during college learning how to write, which was my passion, not making money getting businesses to take out loans."

Juggling consulting work that paid the bills and writing to advance her career, along with rearing two kids, stoked Carsillo's imagination. Remembering the comfort foods of her country upbringing and wanting to feed her kids nutritious meals, she turned to a subject important to single moms striving to maintain a household: food.

She launched her own website — DevelopmentofTaste.com — to distill her humorous take on dishing up healthy meals, becoming the ideal mommypreneur, and tackling issues revolving around social justice and whole foods.

Carsillo stepped up publishing her work, contributing to business-related websites and ghostwriting. She devoted more time to writing and less to consulting, eyeing the completion of her next two books.

"I had finally started the transition to earning a living full-time from writing," said Carsillo. "What I had hoped for in college was now becoming a reality."

In 'Be A Real Beauty 30-Day Meal Planning Guide', Carsillo's second book, she offered homespun tips on quick and easy recipes designed to lure the kids to the table

and wean them from takeout.

With her website and second book, Carsillo had staked out a role as an author who frames life through a quirky mix of recipes and observations of a fiercely independent woman. So, it seemed natural that she would title her third book 'Born Hungry', released in May 2015.

The book is a series of vignettes recapping moments of Carsillo's childhood, each with a hearty country recipe that captures the story of a poor country girl wanting to break out of the role her family had envisioned for her.

"The title comes from striving always to reach for something more as I tried to fill whatever was missing from upbringing," said Carsillo. "That's why SFSC was so special to me: It was the first time in my life that it was acceptable to thirst for knowledge."

"If you're raising Caucasian boys as I am, it's difficult to strike a balance between raising them to be considerate of their privileges while not having to apologize for who they are," said Carsillo. She said she wants her boys to know they move through life with advantages others don't have. "I am trying to teach them simple things like not to tell other boys to don't throw the ball like a girl," Carsillo said while chuckling.

Her book is due out in February, while a revised version of her first book is scheduled for release later this year.

Sign up for Senior Games

Athletes can register
for events through
SFSC website

BY NEIL SIMPSON

Special to Highlands Today

South Florida State College is pleased to announce that registration forms are now available online at www.southflorida.edu/heartlandgames. Residents of Highlands, Hardee and DeSoto counties are encouraged to look over the various events offered and to make plans to participate. This year's Heartland Games include bowling, bridge,

cycling, euchre, golf, indoor volleyball, pickleball, racquetball, shuffleboard, swimming, Tai Chi, tennis and track and field.

The Games will be held from Jan. 23 through the end of March. The 2016 Games are being sponsored by Edward Jones/Alan Holmes, Newsom Eye, Florida Hospital, Drs. Thakkar & Patel, Legacy Bicycles and Wauchula State Bank.

Following a meeting of several of the games coordinators, it was announced that the 2016 entry fee has been reduced to \$15 for a single event or \$25 to participate in multiple events. The entry fee includes a dri-fit

shirt, medals (awarded by age and gender) and lunch at the following events (bridge, euchre, pickleball, shuffleboard and tennis). There is a surcharge for bowling and golf.

Judy Granger, a full-time resident of Sun 'n Lake for seven years, has participated in the Games before and encourages others to do as she has. Sign up for more than one event.

Granger loves to cycle so will be heading out on the Balboa course at Sun 'n Lake on Feb. 20. She is the 2015 Ladies 18 Hole Club Champion at Sun 'n Lake Golf Club.

SENIORS, Page 2



NEIL SIMPSON

Heartland Games event coordinators and SFSC staff, from left, Julio Seda (racquetball), Lorrie Key (games director SFSC), Gary Sorko (shuffleboard), Pat Reich (bridge), Lauren Reddick (SFSC), Evelyn Humphrey (euchre), Earl Maslin (tennis), Tom Stadler (pickleball), Debbie Gutierrez (SFSC).

Seniors

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On March 5, she'll be found at Pinecrest Golf Club in the Heartland Games Golf Tournament.

On March 12 and 13, you'll see Granger at the Sun 'n Lake Racquet Club playing in the pickleball tournament. She has won medals in the

pool in past years, noting that there weren't always other competitors in her 60 to 64 year old age group. She hopes that others will take up the challenge and jump in the YMCA pool with her on March 22.

Registration forms and payment must be received at South Florida State College at least two weeks prior to the first event in which an individual is entered.

Players practicing for pickleball event

Heartland Games
for Active Adults
move competition
to Sun 'n Lake

BY NEIL SIMPSON

Special to Highlands Today

The 2016 Heartland Games for Active Adults Pickleball Tournament will be held at the recently refurbished Sun 'n Lake Racquet Club on March 12 and 13. This will be welcome news

to pickleballers who have had to endure play on the tennis courts at South Florida State College in previous years.

Tenille Drury-Smith, community service director at Sun 'n Lake worked with Lorrie Key, games director, to make this change possible. Tom Stadler and Clayton Farrar have agreed to be the tournament coordinators once again.

On a recent Saturday morning, eight players were on the courts by 8 a.m. and they were soon joined by other eager pick-

leballers. Judy Granger, of Sun 'n Lake, was on the planning committee for the courts. She wishes they had the foresight when planning the new facility to rip out the old asphalt and start from scratch rather than trying to find cost savings by building over the existing tennis courts. She is really thrilled with the condition of the courts now.

Dave Shaner of Highlands Ridge comes to Sun 'n Lake each morning and states: "The new courts are excellent. There are

PICKLEBALL, Page 2



NEIL SIMPSON

From left are pickleball players Randy Crawfis, Keith Addis, Debi Yandell, Mike March and Jim Jones at the Sun 'n Lake Racquet Club.



NEIL SIMPSON

Susan Shaner, left, and Jim Jones play pickleball at Sun 'n Lake Racquet Club.

Pickleball

From Page 1

no cracks and they drain exceptionally well. There has never been any water on the courts in the morning."

Jim Jones, a winter resident at Sun 'n Lake, said: "The courts are now better graded and have an improved playing surface. With eight great courts, we should attract lots of players and many tournaments."

Keith Addis just moved from North Carolina to the Bluffs of Sebring. He had previously played all of his pickleball indoors and notices quite a difference with the wind and other challenges outdoors, but he loves the facility at Sun 'n

Lake. Addis played in the National Senior Games in Saint Paul/Minneapolis in July. Playing with a new partner, he was proud of the fact that they finished seventh out of 39 teams competing in the 65 to 69 year old bracket. He's looking forward to playing in more tournaments.

Be sure to register early for the Heartland Games for Active Adults organized by South Florida State College and sponsored by Edward Jones/Alan Holmes, Newsum Eye, Florida Hospital, Drs. Thakkar & Patel and Legacy Bicycles. I

For information, visit www.southflorida.edu/heartlandgames.

One entry fee covers participation in all games.

MOFAC announces two new exhibits

AVON PARK — The Museum of Florida Art and Culture at South Florida State College will mount two exhibitions in December featuring Florida artists.

"Leaf and Branch and Log and Stump: Landscapes of Jerry Cutler" will be on display Dec. 9 through Feb. 4. Cutler has achieved acclaim for his decades-long study of Florida's landscapes, with a focus on the Everglades.

"Cutler's work is emotionally powerful and personal," said Mollie Doctrow, MOFAC's curator. "Early on he developed his personal expression and he has moved in a direction that shows the growth of this personal view of the world."

Cutler's paintings have been exhibited at more than 200 group and solo shows. In 2010, Cutler retired from the University of Florida, ending a 36-year career of teaching art. His landscape paintings are on display in state office buildings as part of Florida's Art in State Buildings Program.

Doctrow said a second concurrent exhibition of up-and-coming artists from Highlands, Polk, and Sarasota counties will compliment Cutler's landscapes paintings with their own distinctly individual mode of expression.

MOFAC will display the paintings and drawings of these five artists in its "Emerging Voices of Artistic Expression" exhibition that also runs Dec. 9 through Feb. 4.

"The need to create is inherent in everyone, young and old," said Doctrow, "The artists' works in this exhibit will speak to visitors through metaphor, communicating visually through the

personal forms and style of each artist."

The exhibition will include works from local artists Ronnie Fuertes and Jake Noland, and regional artists, Kendal Hanson and Dawn Marie Lee. Sebring residents will know Fuertes's from his colorful tile benches that adorn Sadie Kahn Memorial Park on Ridgewood Drive near the Circle. He will exhibit a series of oil paintings showcasing, like Cutler, a decidedly personal artistic expression.

MOFAC is adjacent to the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts at 600 W. College Drive. The museum is open Wednesday,



Courtesy photo

'The Cypress Dome' by Jerry Cutler.

Thursday, and Friday from 12:30 – 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 Doctrow at 863-784-7240, or email mofac@southflorida.edu. Visit the MOFAC website at mofac.org.



'Mangrove Thicket' by Jerry Cutler.

Thursday, December 3, 2015

Concealed weapons permit course at SFSC

AVON PARK — The South Florida State College Criminal Justice Academy will offer a concealed weapons permit course Saturday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. This course is required to carry a concealed weapon in Florida. Topics to be covered include Florida Statutes, use of deadly force, carry restrictions, and live fire exercises. The cost is \$55.

For information, equipment list, and

maps to the range contact training coordinator Richard Morey at 863-784-7285 or visit www.southflorida.edu/publicservice. Register at any SFSC Campus or center, preregistration is required.

Local Girls To Dance In 'Nutcracker'

By ALLISON SMITH

Herald-Advocate Intern

At this time of year, it's easy to find people caroling.

But rather than singing, Hardee's own 10-year-old Callie Eisenhower and 9-year-old Trista Gilliard will be merrily dancing in a South Florida State College production.

The two girls had attended auditions that were open to the public for the holiday classic ballet, "The Nutcracker." Both made the cut, and will be starring as a Gingerbread Girl (Eisenhower) and a Bon Bon (Gilliard).

Eisenhower has been dancing with Center Stage from Avon Park and Gilliard has been dancing since she was 4 but just recently joined Dance Unlimited of Sebring. They and

See DANCE 2A



COURTESY PHOTO

Trista Gilliard, 9, will join another Hardee Countian, Callie Eisenhauer, 10, in dancing in the classic Christmas production of "The Nutcracker."

DANCE

Continued From 1A

their parents are excited to have their community support them on stage.

The South Carolina Ballet under the direction of William Starrett is working with Nancy McDuffee and the SFSC Performing Arts Center to incorporate those ages 4 and up into this iconic Christmas show, while also bringing the production to life.

Roles including Mice, Bons Bons, Gingerbread Girls, Sugar Plum Fairy Attendants, Dew Drop Fairy Attendants, Land of Sweets Attendants, Trumpeters, Lead Angels and Arch Angels, and Cherubs have already been cast and set.

And, since Oct. 31, Eisenhauer, Gilliard, and the rest of the cast have been working hard to perfect every little plie, twirl and tumble.

Soon all of that hard work will pay off!

On Tuesday the show will premiere at 7 p.m. in the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts on the SFSC campus in Avon Park.

Tickets range from \$15 to \$34 and can be bought online at sfscarts.org/kaleidoscope.

Eisenhauer and Gilliard will be waiting eagerly for everyone to attend, so come out and support the girls and the arts this holiday season!

Register Now For SFSC Spring Term

Registration for South Florida State College's spring term is now underway.

Students can register for classes through Jan. 5, either online or at any SFSC campus.

Classes start Jan. 6 for the 16-week spring term that runs through May 4.

Returning students can register and pay for classes through the college portal, Panther Central. New students can apply for admission to the college by clicking the "Apply Now" button at the top of SFSC's home page at southflorida.edu.

The Advising & Counseling Center accepts walk-in registrations Monday through Thursday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., or Fridays from 8 to 5.

SFSC offers two-year associate degree programs and numerous occupational training

programs for those who wish to enhance their employability skills through shorter courses of study.

The college also offers a Bachelor of Applied Science degree in supervision and management, a Bachelor of Science in elementary education, and a Bachelor of Science in nursing.

Financial aid is available to those who qualify. For more information about financial assistance and scholarships, contact the Financial Aid Office at (863) 784-7134. For further information about registration, call 773-3081.

All campuses will close during the college's winter break, starting tomorrow (Friday) at 5 p.m. to Jan. 4 at 8 a.m. During the break, students can register online by following the Panther Central link at top of SFSC's home page.

Thursday, December 17, 2015

Heartland Games for Active Adults sponsors sought

AVON PARK — The 2016 Heartland Games for Active Adults is seeking businesses and individuals to join with South Florida State College as sponsors. Sponsorship levels are

\$1,000 for gold, \$500 for silver, and bronze is \$250. The games takes place throughout Highlands County the months of January, February, and March.

Alan Holmes of Edward Jones was first to sign on as a gold sponsor, followed by Newsom Eye Center. Silver sponsors already recruited include Florida Hospital, Dr. Thakkar, and Dr. Patel, according to newly appointed Games Ambassador Neil Simpson.

For information, or to sign on as a sponsor, contact Simpson at 863-382-8349 or nsimp76@gmail.com, or contact games coordinator Lorrie Key at 863-784-7033 or lorrie.key@southflorida.edu.

SFSC students raise money for breast cancer

AVON PARK — South Florida State College's Student Government Association (SGA) raised \$250 to help local residents get mammograms in response to Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October.

SGA officers presented the check to Florida Hospital Foundation director Christen Johnson when she visited SFSC's Highlands

Campus on Dec. 9.

"Early detection through mammograms saves lives," Johnson told the SGA officers who greeted her outside the student services building during a break for lunch.

Florida Hospital offers mammograms at its Heartland Breast Care Center in Sebring.

"Each year the students raise money

to support the fight against breast cancer," said Andy Polk, SFSC's coordinator of student life, who serves as an advisor to the SGA.

"This time around we wanted to keep it local and giving our donation to Florida Hospital means it will help people in SFSC's community," said Rebecca McKenzie, SGA president.

Breast Cancer

Awareness Month, now in its 30th year, is an annual campaign to increase awareness of the disease.

After accepting the check, Johnson told the SGA officers the students' work was "pretty amazing." She said, "This check is nearly enough to cover mammograms for three patients and that makes a difference."



Courtesy photo

SFSC coordinator of student life Andy Polk (from left); SGA vice president Hernando Sierra; Rebecca McKenzie, SGA president; Christen Johnson, director of the Florida Hospital Foundation; SGA secretary Ferdinand Cortez; Samantha Vance, SGA vice president; Baylee Gunter, SGA public relations office; and Max Boling, SGA treasurer.

Graduation Day

SFSC fall commencement brings closure to 50th anniversary year

College, students
celebrate 'excellence
in education'

BY MARC VALERO

Highlands Today

AVON PARK — South Florida State College closed out its 50th anniversary year Thursday with the fall 2015 commencement exercises in the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts.

"This is a historic occasion not only because you are graduating, but because we are also concluding our yearlong celebration of 50 years of excellence

in education," said Kris Rider, the chair of SFSC's District Board of Trustees.

SFSC got its start in 1965 when, after approval by the Florida Legislature, it opened in temporary quarters in downtown Avon Park.

"Beginning in 2016, we will focus on the next 50 years, of not only excellence in education, but of growth, expansion and pursuit of our vision," Rider told those attending.

Commencement speaker Martile Blackman earned her Bachelor of Applied Science degree in Supervision and Man-

SFSC, Page 10



MARC VALERO/STAFF

The fall 2015 commencement marked the end of South Florida State College's 50th anniversary.

SFSC

From Page 1

agement. She graduated from SFSC in December 2013 with her associate in arts degree.

During the 31-year stretch between her freshman year at SFSC and graduation this month, Blackman married and raised five children.

"I used to have a problem finishing something I started. The only reason I finished a pregnancy was that I had no choice — nature took over," said Blackman, to the laughter of the students and guests. "I have now proved to myself and others that I can finish what I start and excel at it by where I am standing today."

Blackman challenged her fellow graduates to set aside the feelings of doubt, fear and failure and seek joy in their lives.

She noted that during her years at the college she met many students with challenges in their lives that did not hinder their ed-

ucational pursuits.

"Add value to all you meet," she said. "I am a proud graduate of the South Florida State College Class of 2015."



Prior to the presentation of diplomas, SFSC President Thomas C. Leitzel encouraged the graduates to do "amazing things" with their lives.

"Live each day with a curious mind, a generous disposition and a desire to stand up for what's fair and what is right," he said.

In all, 202 students had met SFSC's graduation requirements. The college conferred the Bachelor of Applied Science degree in Supervision and Management to 21 graduates.

The college awarded associate degrees to 109 students. Vocational certificates or college credit certificates went to 57 students, with 15 others graduating from the adult education program.

Family and friends who could not attend the ceremony were



MARC VALERO/STAFF

A student is congratulated by SFSC President Thomas Leitzel.

able to go online to watch a live stream of the speakers and the students crossing the stage.

mvalero@highlandstoday.com
(863) 386-5826

Dec. 21, 15 - Herald Advocate, Thursday

SFSC Matinee Series Coming

Good Time Tuesdays, an early afternoon series of world-class entertainment will begin on Jan. 5 at the South Florida State College's Avon Park campus.

Tickets for the 10-week 1:30 p.m. series can be obtained online 24 hours a day at www.sfs-carts.org or by calling 863-784-7178 weekdays. Cost is \$130 for all 10 performances. Individual tickets range from \$13 to \$28. Group rates for 12 or more are available. All shows are at the Florida Museum of Art and Culture in the Wildstein Center for Performing Arts. The center opens one hour before performances.

It starts Jan. 5 with the Equinox Orchestra, starring Jeremy Davis and singer Clay Johnson in a combination of big band music, a Rat Pack style of high energy music.

Next up in the Jan. 12 Simon and Son with an afternoon of hear-warming popular and classical music, with a crowd sing-a-long.

On Jan. 19, it is the piano magic of Floyd Cramer by his grandson Jason Coleman with pop, country and rock piano style.

The international hit show "Bravo Amici" is set for Jan. 26, with a unique "popera" sound, a globe-trotting group of tenors and divas.

On Feb. 2, step back to the folk-rock movement of the 1960s with A Band Called Honalee, with a afternoon of inspiring folk music of the '60s era.

"Dear Ann Landers, The Lady With All The Answers," on Feb. 9, is a one-woman play focusing on a night in 1975 with a smile-

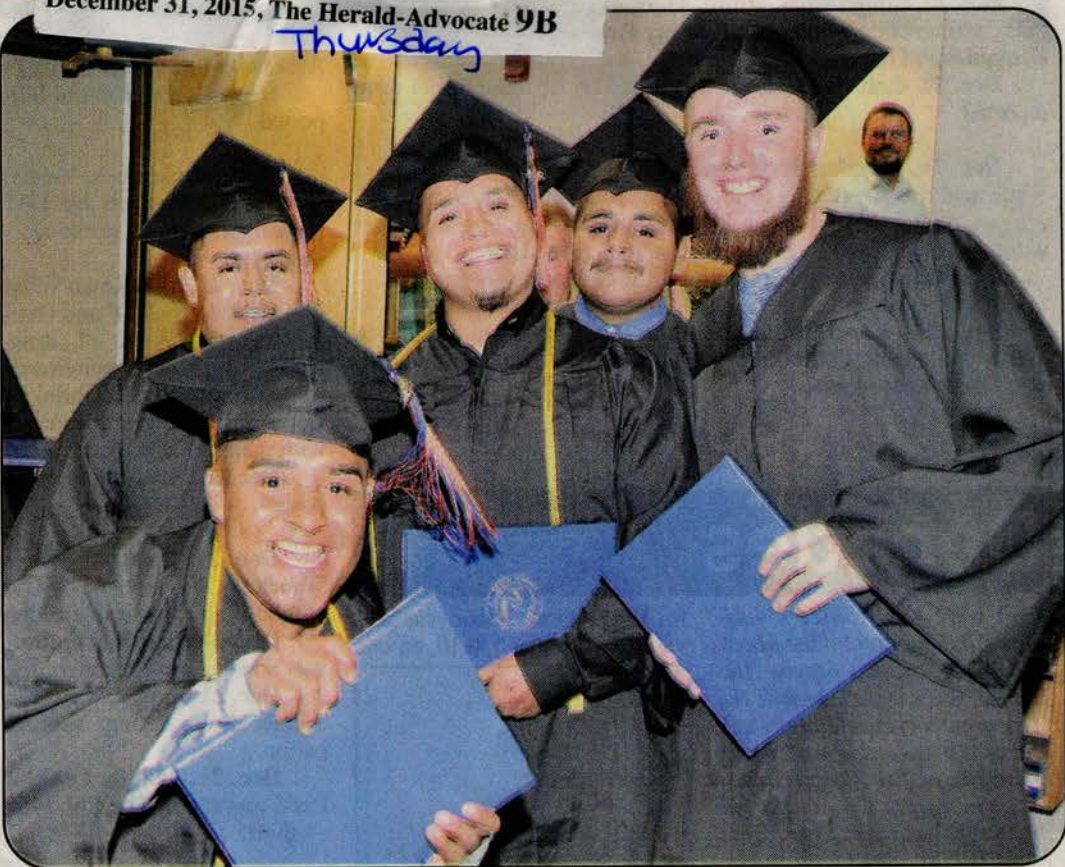
inducing, witty and validating comedy.

On Feb. 16, the hottest dance show in Florida—Ballroom: South Beach Style, bring Latin-style ballroom with gorgeous costuming, music from the past and intricate rhumba, mambo, salso and jive dancing.

A musical ride of the '50s, '60s and '70s come on Feb. 23 with a high energy performance by Phil Dirt and the Dozers.

March moves in with the award-winning portrayal of Groucho Marx on March 1. Actor/playwright Frank Ferrante brings the legendary comedian to life in this fast-paced show of one-liners, anecdotes and songs.

The season finale, on March 8, is New Odyssey presenting three guys on 30 instruments with musical inventiveness and comic skills.



COURTESY PHOTO

Earning Electrical Lineman degrees at the Hardee campus were (from left) Regino Cisneros, Armando Alvarez, Jonathan Martinez, Roman Alvarez and Dillon Cloud.

SFSC Graduates 202 Students

South Florida State College marked the end of its 50th anniversary with its fall graduation ceremony on Dec. 17.

Held in the Wildstein Center For Performing Arts on the Avon Park campus, the evening includes over 100 graduates robed in academic regalia signifying their accomplishments.

The college got its start in 1965 after approval of the Florida Legislature, with temporary quarters in downtown Avon Park. Since then, it has expanded to campuses in Hardee and DeSoto counties as well as Highlands.

Beginning 2016, we will focus on the next 50 years, not

only of excellence in education, but of growth and expansion, and pursuit of our vision," said Kris Rider, chairwoman of the college Board of Trustees. Among the seven other trustees in attendance were Hardee representatives, vice chair Derren Bryan and Ken Lambert.

Among the graduates were five from the Hardee campus program in electrical lineman studies, including Armando Alvarez, Roman Alvarez, Regino Cisneros, Dillon Cloud and Jonathan Martinez.

In all, there were 202 graduates, with 21 receiving the bachelor of applied science in supervision and management.

There were 109 earning associate degrees, another 57 with vocational certificates or college credit certificates and 15 from the Adult Education program.

The oldest graduate was 52-year-old Martile Blackman, who gave the student commencement speech. She started her freshman year 34 years ago, put her education on hold while she raised her five children and went back to college in 2012 to earn her associate, then bachelor degrees.

Dr. Thomas C. Leitzel, the college's fourth president, urged the graduates to show their Panther Pride. "You earned this moment," he said.

Lifetime Learners classes to begin Jan. 14 at SFSC

By **KIM LEATHERMAN**
CORRESPONDENT

AVON PARK — It is said that you should try and learn something new every day.

Being an adult does not mean the end of education and South Florida State College is encouraging adults to keep learning with its Lifetime Learning Institute classes starting on Jan. 14.

Classes will wrap up with a special luncheon field trip on March 31.

Sessions will take place at the Highlands Campus, at 600 College Drive in Avon Park.

The classes are non-credited and offer educational opportunities for adults to learn more about their communities and beyond. The sessions are short and offer a wide variety of topics and many field trips to relevant locales.

Some of the topics the classes deal with are handicapped acceptance, fraud protection, Everglades restoration, Avon Park history and many more. Classes are taught by local business leaders, authors and experts in the field. Anne Reynolds, David Austin and James Deal are just a few of the instructors that will be teaching.

Kicking off the season on Jan. 14 will be Operation S*M*A*S*H taught by Cindy Marshall, director of Program Development for the Ridge Area Arc. The acronym stands for Start Making Acceptance Simpler for Handicap. The class will delve into communicating and accepting persons with disabilities and culminate with a field trip to the Ridge Area Arc to gain understanding on the programs that have been successful there.

On Jan. 21, the session is Protecting Yourself from Financial Fraud. The session will be taught by Edward Jones' financial planner Jeff Roth and Highlands County Sheriff's Office's Nell Hayes, who is both a public information officer and crime prevention specialist. The two instructors will help you to avoid being scammed.

Also on Jan. 21 is The Accidental Baker: A Cake for Every Crisis author Barbara Miachika. This professional chef will share how the events of her life led her to her exciting career.

On Jan. 28, Lifetime Learners will hear from the owners of Maxwell

Groves as they give students an education on the History of a Florida Packing House.

In session B, James Deal will teach A Journey Through Avon Park's History.

David Austin, Highlands County residential horticultural agent will teach Alternative Fruit Trees and Crops to Citrus on Feb. 4. This Session A class will guide individuals in planting alternative trees in their backyard due to green-ing limitations.

Feb. 4 Session B learners will hear about the Kissimmee River Restoration Project, led by Bill Graf, Intergovernmental and outreach representative. The project aims to restore the flow of 40 miles of water flow by 2019.

Feb. 11 Is Healing Waters for Session A. The class taught by Lykes Bros. senior ecologist Linda McCarthy will explain the steps taken to restore local waters and how they are cleansed before flowing into the Everglades to protect ecosystems.

Feb. 11 Session B will be a look at the Mason G. Smoak Foundation taught by executive director Amy Smith. Smith will cover the history and functions of the MGSE.

Feb. 18 is a special field trip that will cover both sessions. Sebring Regional Airport: Wings and Things will be presented by John and Becky Rousch of the Experimental Aircraft Association. Learners will discover the businesses related to the aviation industry and even take a flight to view the area from 2,000 feet in the air. A cook-out in a hangar will be offered.

On Feb. 25, both sessions will be taught by Ray McIntyre, past president of the Florida Cracker Trail Association. Session A will be The Florida Cracker History followed by Session B, The History of Florida Cracker Trail Ride. Learn about the great adventures of the early Florida trailblazers.

March 3 will have you looking towards the stars as Clifford Perkall teaches Astronomy: The Night Sky is for Everyone in session A. Perkall will cover sky charts, telescopes and stars you can see without the aid of expensive equipment.

In Session B on

March 3, Dean Kevin Brown will teach Applied Sciences and Technologies. He will focus on those taught at SFSC.

On March 10, author and retired teacher Anne Reynolds will teach both sessions. Session A will be Layers of Time: The Blueberry Story. In this class Reynolds will discuss the archaeological findings of Native Americans living in Central Florida 6,000 years ago.

Session B will be Writing a Novel: The Process, Pitfalls and Rewards. Reynolds will use her own experiences and those of other authors to encourage fellow and novice writers in their journey.

March 17 there will be no classes due to Spring Break.

March 24 will see both sessions taking a field trip to be announced.

March 31 Session A is Citra Pac - Fruit Pearls, Changing the Way the World Eats Citrus taught by Gregg Harshman, Citra Pac president. He will discuss the frozen fruit treats, encouraging healthy decisions to eat more fruit.

Session B is a field trip to wrap up the Lifetime Learners season. The closing luncheon will be held at The Hotel Jacaranda.

The Lifetime Learners meet on Thursdays in Building T, room 20. Session A begins at 9 a.m. and session B starts at 11 a.m. Classes are limited to 40 pupils and average \$12. Special pricing is available if you plan to attend all of the courses offered. A registration packet is available online; go to www.southflorida.edu or call Lauren Redick at 863-784-7388.

▶ THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2015 ♦ HIGHLANDS TODAY

'Oh, What a Night'

Midtown Men wow the crowd at the Wildstein Center



Broadway's 'Jersey Boys' hits a high note with 1960s classics

BY MARC VALERO

Highlands Today

AVON PARK — The Midtown Men hit the stage running and never slowed down in delivering exciting versions of the hits of the 1960s from the harmonies and falsetto of Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons to the soulful sounds of Motown.

It appeared to be a capacity crowd for the Tuesday evening concert in the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts at South Florida State College.

The Midtown Men, who were in the original cast of the acclaimed Broadway Show "Jersey Boys," weren't shy about showing some Jersey swagger as they boasted they outsold the Jay Leno show, which was held in November.

They kicked off the show big with the first two hits (from 1962) of the Four Seasons "Big Girls Don't Cry" and "Sherry."

Michael Longoria, who portrayed Valli on Broadway, looked the part of a singer from the early 1960s with a perfect pompadour. His falsetto and head voice (natural voice) hit the sweet spot on both the Four Seasons' tunes and others such as "Unchained Melody" and

the Ronettes' "Be My Baby."

The vocal quartet is rounded out with Christian Hoof, who won a Tony Award for his portrayal of Four Seasons member Tommy DeVito; Tony Award-nominated actor J. Robert Spencer, who portrayed Four Seasons member Nick Massi; and Daniel Reichard, who played Four Seasons member and songwriter Bob Gaudio.

Wearing matching dark suits with skinny ties, the fellows presented the sound of what they called the "greatest decade in rock 'n roll."

They put on a visual show also with chore-

MIDTOWN, Page 3



MARC VALERO/STAFF

Top: The Midtown Men perform Tuesday evening at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts at South Florida State College. **Above right:** Michael Longoria, of the Midtown Men, portrayed Frankie Valli on Broadway in the "Jersey Boys." **Above left:** J. Robert Spencer of the Midtown Men.

Midtown

From Page 1

ography reminiscent of the male Motown groups such as the Four Tops and The Temptations.

A hip swiveling move brought a cheer from the crowd.

Along with their great harmony singing, each member took numerous turns on lead vocals, which showcased their individual vocal talents and styles.

The arrangements stayed true to the original versions, but with some added flourishes especially near the endings of the songs.

The seven-piece backing band, including three brass, provided excellent backing for the vocalists on tunes ranging from the Turtle's "Happy Together" to Buffalo Springfield's "For What it is Worth."

Interspersed among the 1960s classics, The Midtown Men present-

ed holiday favorites such as "Let it Snow," "Winter Wonderland" and the Darlene Love classic "Christmas (Baby Please Come Home)."

After the intermission, the backing band performed a medley of television show themes and one movie theme — "Mission Impossible," "Pink Panther," "Munster's," "Batman" and "Hawaii Five-O."

At the conclusion of the concert, The Midtown Men invited the audience to stand and dance to the 1975-76 Four Seasons hit "December, 1963 (Oh, What a Night)."

They returned for an encore with one the brightest sounding hits of the Four Seasons from 1965 — "Bye, Bye Baby (Baby Goodbye)."

David Lewis of Avon Park said it was a good show with the group presenting a good mix of music.

mvalero@highlandstoday.com
(863) 386-5826

Austin commits to Panthers

Sebring standout
to play for South
Florida State College

Highlands Today sports staff

AVON PARK — Jordan Austin and Matt Portis have done some pretty good things on the baseball field together, including winning a Dixie Youth Baseball World Series title and district titles and state playoff games with the Sebring Blue Streaks.

They hope the best is yet to come, however, as they will be teammates one more time next season, as Austin committed to

joining the South Florida State College Panthers.

Austin is entering his senior season with the Blue Streaks, but committed to the Panthers early. He can make it official on Jan. 15, when NJCAA National Signing Day takes place.

"We were very excited when we received the call from Jordan," said South Florida State College Athletic Director and head baseball coach Rick Hitt. "We met with him very early on this fall and were hoping he would become a member of our 2016-17 recruiting class. Jordan brings quality athleticism to the outfield position and we think

he has a chance to be an excellent college player."

Austin is no stranger to Hitt, as he has attended a number of South Florida baseball camps over the years.

Portis is beginning his freshman season with the Panthers, so the former teammates will be reunited next season.

Hitt has made it a habit of getting top-notch local players on his team and this year's roster includes sophomores Jonathan Struck (Sebring) and Alfred Brown (Avon Park), along with freshmen Laine Daum (Lake Placid) and Cody Spencer

AUSTIN, Page 2



Sebring's Jordan Austin crosses home plate during a game. He has committed to South Florida State College.

FILE PHOTO

Austin

From Page 1

(Hardee).

"It is great that another outstanding local player has chosen to continue his academic and athletic goals at SFSC," Hitt said. "We are looking forward to having Jordan here next year."

As a junior, Austin was a member of the Highlands Today All-Highlands Baseball team after he batted .303 and had an on-base percentage of .410, while helping the Blue Streaks to within one game of the state tournament. The speedy centerfielder scored 24 runs and saved plenty more with his defensive play.

"Jordan covered gap-to-gap and ran down a lot of balls in the outfield," Sebring coach Jasone DeWitt said. "He was a good leadoff hitter and set the table for our offense."



ALLEN MOODY/STAFF

Sebring's Jordan Austin reacts after hitting a two-run triple during Tuesday's win over Lemon Bay.

Austin also made the All-Highlands Baseball Team as a sophomore, as he hit .277 and scored 22 runs for the Blue Streaks.

The Panthers begin the 2016 regular season on Jan. 29 with a home double-header against Ave Marie University.