

SFSC offers IT programs online

Special to Highlands News-Sun

AVON PARK — South Florida State College is now offering two of its information technology programs online: the Associate in Science in Networking Systems Technology and the College Credit Certificate in Network Security. Fall term classes at SFSC begin on Friday, Aug. 17.

Network security is a high-demand, specialized field of computer networking. In a wired world where sensitive information is transmitted over internal networks and the internet, network security specialists maintain hardware and software, monitor networks for unauthorized access, vulnerabilities, and attacks, and implement policies and procedures that protect networks from hacking.

The U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics expects that jobs for network and computer systems administrators will grow by 28 percent through 2020, faster than the average for all occupations.

With the Associate in Science in Network Systems Technology, graduates will earn 60 college credits in

approximately two years. Students become proficient in basic and advanced concepts of network operation, support and security. They learn concepts, theory and hand-on laboratory skills that can be used in the workplace.

In as little as one year, graduates of the Network Security program will earn 30 hours of college credits and receive the tools and training they need to pursue the CompTIA A+, CompTIA Network+, and CompTIA Security+ industry certifications. If a graduate chooses to continue in their studies, the 30 college credits can be applied toward the A.S. in Network Systems Technology.

The quality of these programs is reflected by the distinguished endorsements they have received from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, FBI InfraGard, and the National Initiative for Cybersecurity Careers and Studies.

The SFSC Welcome Center on the Highlands campus in Avon Park accepts walk-in registrations Monday through Thursday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Fridays, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Students can

also register at the DeSoto campus in Arcadia, the Hardee campus in Bowling Green, and at the Lake Placid Center in Lake Placid.

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 homepage at southflorida.edu where class schedules are also available.

Financial aid is available to those who qualify. For more information about financial assistance and scholarships, contact the SFSC Financial Aid Office at 863-784-7134. For more information about registration, call 863-453-6661 (Highlands campus), 863-773-3081 (Hardee campus), 863-993-1757 (DeSoto campus), or 863-465-3003 (Lake Placid Center).

For more information about the information technology programs, contact Brian Bohlman at 863-784-7443 or visit the SFSC website at southflorida.edu.

SFSC sociology professor nurtures cultural relativity

SPECIAL TO
HIGHLANDS NEWS-SUN

AVON PARK — Sonji Nicholas, professor of sociology at SFSC, loves to travel. Through her life experience, Nicholas has connected her students with the world and nurtured cultural relativity.

"I was born into a traveling family," she said. "My parents are Jamaican-American and were part of the Windrush generation."

A post-World War II immigration boom in the United Kingdom began in June 1948 when the passenger ship, the Empire Windrush, arrived in England from Jamaica, carrying 492 immigrants in search of employment and prosperity. Because of a labor shortage between 1948 and 1971, the United Kingdom encouraged immigration from Commonwealth countries to help rebuild the country. Many people came from Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and other Caribbean countries.



COURTESY PHOTO

Sonji Nicholas at Maison des Esclaves on Goree Island, Senegal.

"My parents had known each other in Jamaica, got re-acquainted in England, and were married in London in 1960," Nicholas said. "My dad went into the Air Force and my mom attended nursing school. I was born there, and we lived in England until my parents decided to return to Jamaica. On the way back, our ship stopped at 18 different locations, such as Trinidad and Venezuela. That's probably how my interest in travel got started."

In the early 1970s,

SONJI

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Nicholas' parents headed for the United States, where they felt they had better job prospects. The family settled in West Nyack, New York, where she grew up.

Nicholas went on to earn her Bachelor of Business Administration from Howard University in Washington, D.C. and took a job as an insurance adjuster right out of college. But underneath it all lurked an interest in sociology. "My history of moving around and living in different cultures may have sparked it," she said. "I studied business as the practical side of me. But all along, I took electives in social and behavioral sciences. I was studying a lot of African history, while at Howard University. Then I studied on my own and with groups in the community."

With her African history study group, she took her first of four trips to Africa, visiting the countries of Senegal and Gambia. The location that most moved Nicholas was Goree Island, off the coast of Dakar, Senegal's capital city. This UNESCO World Heritage site is known for its role in the 15th to 19th century slave trade. On the island is the Maison des Esclaves, or House of Slaves, where an estimated 20 million Africans captured for enslavement were held before being shipped to the New World.

"I got to see this structure and got a sense of how those who were captured lived, sometimes up to a year," Nicholas said. "It was impactful to be in those quarters and imagine what it was like for my

ancestors. Women were kept in one room, men in another, and children in another. The windows in the rooms were triangular with a small opening for air. They left through the 'Door of No Return' and walked a plank that lead out to a ship.

She also traveled to northern Senegal to visit the Grand Mosque of Touba, one of the largest mosques in Africa. "Senegal is 90 percent Muslim," she said.

"In Dakar, I got to experience the differences in culture from our own, things we take for granted," she said. "I was struck by the level of religiosity. I went to a bank to exchange money one day at 11:30 a.m. When I got to the bank, I was surprised to find it locked. It turned out that bank managers closed shop for a few hours to allow employees to participate in mid-day prayer."

Nicholas continued her academic studies and was awarded her Master of Arts in African Studies from the State University of New York at Albany and her Master of Philosophy and her doctorate in Sociology from The Graduate Center of C.U.N.Y.

She went on to teach sociology as adjunct faculty at what is now Florida Southwestern State College in Fort Myers, Florida, and took a position as program manager for the Florida Department of Health's Healthy Families program.

"Healthy Families is a parenting education program that's based on sociological research," she said. "Thirty years of research has shown that by working with families who are expecting a baby and providing them

information about early childhood development, brain development, and child safety significantly helps to prevent child abuse and neglect."

Nicholas is currently a member of the Highlands County Healthy Families advisory board and encourages students in her sociology classes at SFSC to get involved. "When we get to the unit on Family in class, I ask representatives from Healthy Families to talk with the students about the organization's mission and how it works with families. The presentations give students a connection to what we're studying and provides an example of how sociological knowledge can be applied in work settings."

In spite of her vibrant academic career, Nicholas' love of travel has never ceased. She's visited many locations in the Caribbean, Africa, Central America, North America, and Europe. "I haven't been to Asia, but it's on my list," she said.

In fact, Nicholas had an opportunity to re-visit Senegal in summer 2016, when she was selected to participate in the prestigious Fulbright-Hays Seminar Abroad program.

Along with 15 other scholars, Nicholas visited Senegal for six weeks, focusing on religion and diversity in West Africa. "That was right up my alley," she said. "It had been close to 30 years since I'd last been in Senegal."

"One of our leaders was an anthropologist of Senegalese heritage who was with the Boston University African Studies Center," she said. "We had lectures at the West African Research Center in Dakar, toured places of worship, and visited towns and rural

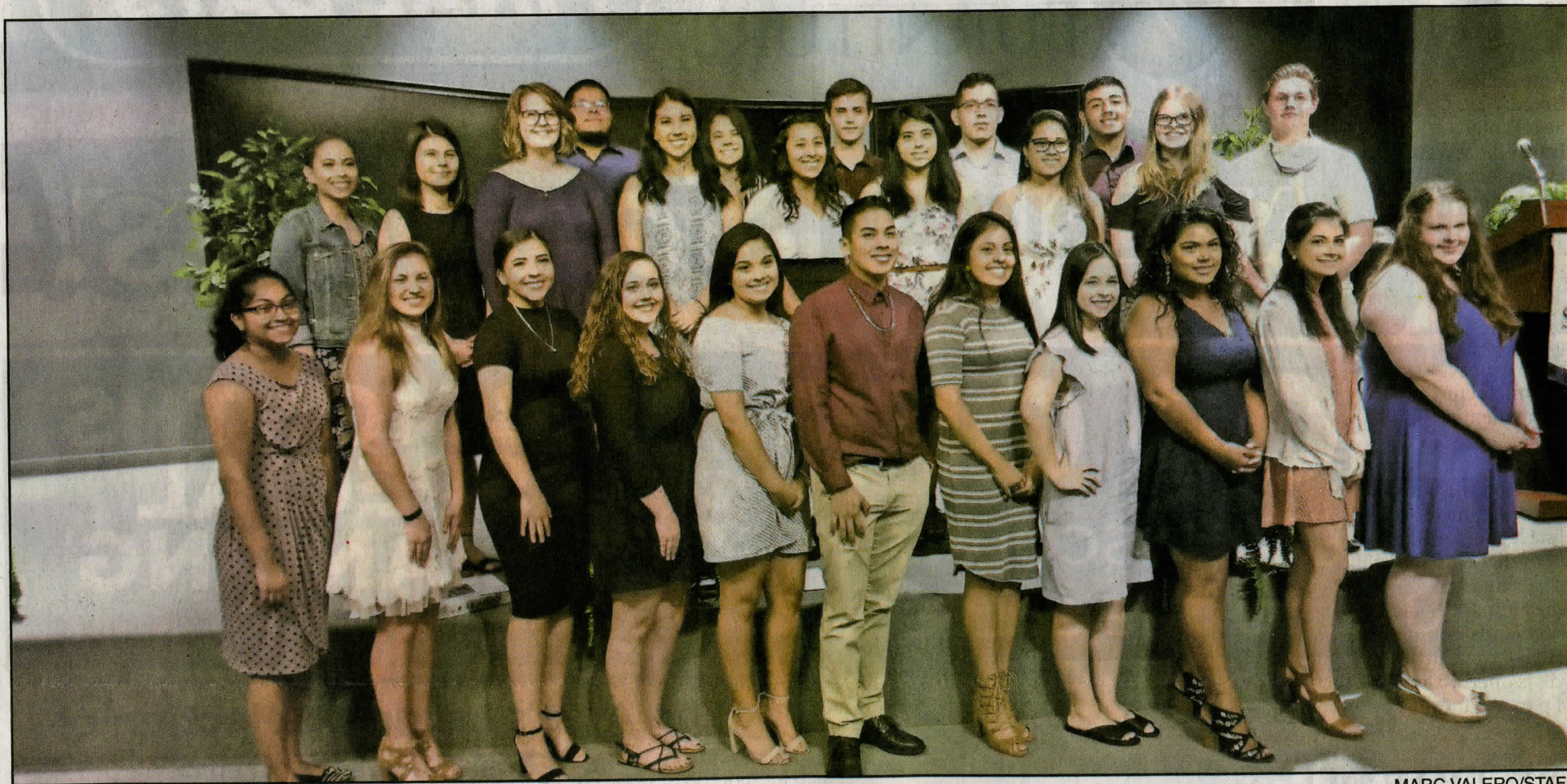
Nicholas extended her experience to students enrolled in her Honors course the semester after she returned from Senegal. "I had them do a global pen pal project," she said. "Each of the students was paired with a university student in Senegal. The Honors Interdisciplinary Seminar class was called 'Marriage and Families across Cultures' with a focus on Senegal. Over the course of the semester, my students got to know their global pen pals. They would ask about their pen pals' families and learn how they are similar and different from their own."

"My students were able to link up with people from across the globe, get directly connected, make new friends, and learn about other people who normally wouldn't be on their radar," she said. "With technology, it was possible for my students to experience this. It couldn't have happened that way 20 years ago."

In her Introduction to Sociology class, Nicholas emphasizes culture and how groups influence individuals. "I often draw on my travels," she said.

"In my classes at SFSC, we spend a lot of time talking about awareness," she said. "We need to recognize social context to better understand why people do what they do. We need to step into other peoples' shoes and understand the bigger picture of their lives and develop a sense of cultural relativity. We're a nation of immigrants. We have to be aware that others don't always do things as we do things. We need to be less judgmental and more understanding in our increasingly globalized society."

Take Stock in Children recognizes mentors, students



MARC VALERO/STAFF

The Take Stock in Children graduating Class of 2018 at Thursday evening's recognition event at the South Florida State College University Center.

By **MARC VALERO**

STAFF WRITER

AVON PARK — The dedicated mentors and their hardworking students in Take Stock in Children were recognized Thursday during its year-end program at the University Center at South Florida State College.

The students, their families, mentors and college staff members in the program, supported by the SFSC Foundation, gathered to look back at the accomplishments of the students who shared their future educational/career plans.

The mentors were thanked for donating their time to meet one-on-one to help guide their students' efforts in school.

Sebring High School senior Chandler Gowan said he will be going to the University of South Florida to study premed with a goal of being in

the USF medical program to become a doctor.

His mentor was his math teacher from Sebring Middle School — Lyle Pontious.

"It was pretty good having a role model to keep in touch with over the years and just having somebody that you can look up to who helps you if you are having troubles or problems, advice or anything like that," he said. "It has been a good support for moving on to the later stages in life."

Lake Placid High senior Gianna Saccente said Take Stock in Children helped by giving her the option to go to college.

She plans on going to SFSC for two years and then transferring to the University of Central Florida to study child psychology.

George Hensley has been a mentor in the program for several years.

"You hope that you are



From left: Sebring High graduate Nathalie Palacios and her mentor, Heather Beato, share their experiences in the Take Stock in Children program.

able to give the students good advice, have some interaction and be a friend of theirs," he said,

and help steer them toward college, the military or a career.

Mentors encourage

them to study, use good judgment and use their skills, Hensley said.

The Take Stock in Children Class of 2018 had 31 graduates among the college's three county district: Sebring High - 10; Avon Park High - 2; Lake Placid High - 5; Hardee Senior High - 8 and DeSoto High - 6.

South Florida State College Foundation Inc. Executive Director Jamie Bateman said the class had an average GPA of 3.75 with 12 over a 4.0 GPA and the highest GPA at 4.85.

Among the 31 Take Stock graduates, 14 were in the top 10 percent of their graduating class. Three had already graduated from high school with their AA degree, three were going into the military and two graduated from high school early in December.

Take Stock in Children matches students at risk of not completing high school with mentors who guide them toward earning their diplomas,

It is a statewide

program that provides children with a mentor and a two-plus-two college scholarship — two years at a state or community college and two years at a state university in Florida.

The Take Stock staff also help the student obtain financial assistance for housing, transportation, and other such expenses.

In return, the student signs a contract to earn at least a grade of C in every class, graduate from high school with good attendance records, maintain good behavior in school and have no involvement with law enforcement or drugs.

The SFSC Foundation serves as the lead agency for Take Stock in its service area of DeSoto, Hardee, and Highlands counties.

To learn more about Take Stock in Children or to volunteer as a mentor, contact Take Stock in Children Coordinator Irene Castanon at 863-784-7343.



KIM LEATHERMAN/STAFF

These young people are working hard in the heat at Interlanke Boulevard and Main Avenue in Lake Placid last week.

Panther Youth Program a win-win for all

**Towns get help,
students gain
experience**

By KIM LEATHERMAN

STAFF WRITER

LAKE PLACID — Nearly 20 students from the Panther Youth Program “worked” for Keep Lake Placid Beautiful last week. The students did not stop there; they are working in Sebring and Avon Park this week at Habitat for Humanity and The Arc respectively, with their mentors.

The program is through South Florid State College and brings high school juniors and seniors together with mentors to gain real work experience that they can use in their future.

“We focus on transitioning from high school to a post secondary education, employment or military

YOUTH

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careers," Eddie Cuencas, program specialist, said. "We work with students from Highlands, Hardee, DeSoto and Okeechobee counties."

The students had to apply for the position, just as they would if they were applying for a job. The students put in a full schedule of manual labor from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. with a scheduled lunch.

In Lake Placid, the youth weeded the caladium beds and prepared them for new bulbs to be planted for the Caladium Festival in Stuart Park. Up and down Main Avenue and Interlake Boulevard, beds were raked and weeded. The Miracle League ball field got some special attention from the youth as well.

"The kids met every morning and we gave them the instructions and the tools they would need for the day," Donald Clarke with Keep Lake Placid Beautiful said. "They have been working very hard. This is a big help to us; this is a big favor to the town. These kids will have a jump ahead of other kids because of the experience. This is a well-rounded program."

Panther Program Coordinator Leah Sauls said the young men and women received a lot of positive feedback from people in the town (Lake Placid), from people driving by, and from the business owners.

"People are telling the kids, 'thank you for keeping the town nice' and 'great job,'" she said. "Some people think they are out here doing community hours because they got in trouble but we correct them. The kids also get exposed to

networking because they are meeting people when they are out."

Cuencas pointed out the young people are getting more than just hands-on learning; they are getting soft skills, resume help and social skills. He credits the success of the program to the partnership the college has with Career Source Heartland and working with the area school staff and principals to identify "at risk" kids.

"The kids are learning how to interact and use social skills. Most of them didn't know each other when they started, but now they have made friends and have added each other to their social medias," Cuencas said. "Even when we are at lunch, we are engaging them with ice breakers. On Tuesday, we asked what they would change in the world if they had the ability. Wednesday we talked about barriers to reaching their goals

and how to overcome them."

Even in the heat, with sweat rolling down their brows, the youngsters still had smiles lighting up their faces. It seemed as if they were enjoying themselves.

"I'm doing it because I like helping the community," Neaychma Fogle, 17, from Avon Park High School said. "I would want others to do this for my city (Avon Park). I really like to see it well maintained. I met a lot of people from Lake Placid and Okeechobee. We all added each other to our social media to stay in touch."

Lake Placid Horticulture and Sidewalk Supervisor Danny LaMarre was thrilled to have the help weeding, raking, trash pick up and more.

"These students are an amazing help," he said. "They are working very, very hard. I cannot tell you how much they are helping out the town."

Getting ahead

SFSC Collegiate High School student Caroline Taylor is focused, determined

DOROTHY HARRIS
CORRESPONDENT

education tracks, Collegiate High School allows motivated students like Taylor a faster and surprisingly cost-effective way

to their future careers.

"It is pretty awesome," said Taylor. "I get my books through Sebring High School and the

classes are already paid for me." She planned her schedule

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SEBRING — Sebring resident Caroline Taylor has recently completed all her spring classes and is technically a high school senior and a college sophomore through the Collegiate High School offered at South Florida State College.

When Taylor graduates, she will walk for her high school diploma and also receive her Associate's degree in Health Sciences.

Offered by SFSC, Collegiate High School allows well-prepared high school juniors or seniors to attend college classes full-time. Students complete at least 30 credit hours of college coursework and then

apply those to the college or university that they attend for their bachelor's degree.

Students like Taylor have to think ahead as their two years of foreign language, English, Algebra I, Geometry, Biology I, Earth Space Science, Human Geography, HOPE and Leadership Techniques courses have to be completed prior to entering Collegiate High School.

Students desiring this advanced track also sign a contract acknowledging the need for academic readiness, social maturity and self-motivation. With five degree-related



Collegiate high schooler, Caroline Taylor, seen here with mother Dara, still participates in sports at the high school, but attends college for her classes.



COURTESY PHOTO

Caroline Taylor, seen during a competition at Disney's Wide World of Sports, has been a cheer leader since age 5.

FOCUSED

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through her helpful guidance counselor and admitted she never really goes to the high school anymore. "I still do sports though and did cheerleading all through high school."

Taylor likes that she is able to finish her classes at SFSC in plenty of time. "I enjoy a shortened school week as I don't have classes on Fridays." The classes are harder though. "You have to pay attention and be responsible, but I like it. They treat you like an adult, not like a little kid."

Rules may be more relaxed than a typical high school experience, but more self-governance is needed. Taylor feels as though the college instructors genuinely care and try to help

students too.

"There is less work in general, but it has to be amazing and more quality based. Expectations are much higher and there's less margin for errors," said Taylor.

Even with no time for slacking off, she finds the flexible experience more relaxed. Rules are focused on academics not social issues, and Taylor likes being away from what she referred to as high school drama. "I don't feel like I'm missing out on anything. I'm with like-minded, education-focused students."

Taylor's mother is a Florida Virtual School teacher who learned about the Collegiate High School and knew it would be a good fit for her daughter. "I want to go to medical school so this allows me to fast track and save money. It's like getting two years of college for free," added

Taylor.

Originally she was interested in pursuing plastic surgery so she could travel to other countries and provide care to those with deformities or birth defects. Now Taylor is leaning toward obstetrics and thinking she might want to specialize in Caesarean sections.

Her sister currently attends Florida State University so she's considering completing her prerequisites there, but hasn't decided what college she'd like to go to for her medical degree.

Considering she is still a teenager, her razor-sharp focus and determination are quite remarkable. In some ways however, Taylor feels like this is easier. "In regular school I felt like we completed so much busy work. I prefer to learn this way. It feels like I'm accomplishing something that will

actually help me in the long run."

Starting classes at a later time of day and finishing earlier is also a plus for this busy young woman who provides her own transportation to the college.

In addition to her intensive educational experience, Taylor also works at a local preschool and her father's construction company office. For fun, she cheers with Edge All Stars and competes with Sebring High School's Competition Cheer Team. Cheering since age five, she has 12 years of cheer competition under her belt and recently returned from the D2 Summit in Orlando, which is a really big deal. Held at Disney's Wide World of Sports, she was quite excited for the opportunity.

"Everyone's different," said Taylor. "I like learning this way. For me



COURTESY PHOTO

Co-owner of Christ Academy Preschool, Becky Gotsch poses with Caroline Taylor who works part time at the facility.

being apart from the focus on what you look like or what you're wearing is a big plus."

SFSC introduces Public Safety Communication Program

SPECIAL TO HIGHLANDS
NEWS-SUN

AVON PARK — The South Florida State College (SFSC) Criminal Justice Academy is offering its new Public Safety Communication program in fall 2018.

The Public Safety Communication program prepares students for a career as a Public Safety Telecommunicator (PST) who are the first, first responders in emergency situations. The role of a PST is vital to a community and SFSC's program will train students for civilian employment as a dispatcher (police, fire, and emergency medical telecommunicator) who operates telephones, radios, and computer terminals to respond to emergency and non-emergency requests for assistance.

"At SFSC, we listen to the community and heard that there was a need for more



COURTESY PHOTO

The Criminal Justice Academy at SFSC will offer a new Public Safety Communication program this fall.

dispatchers throughout the region," said Curtis Ivy, director of the Criminal Justice Academy at SFSC. "To meet that need, we analyzed the programs we have in place and the capabilities of our experienced faculty, so we applied and received certification from the State of Florida

to present the Public Safety Communication program. Similar to our lineman, elementary education, and mechatronics programs, we believe that this program will fill a void in the tri-county area."

Throughout the intensive program, students will spend more than 200 hours learning

about ethics and the role of the PST; standard operating procedures; the PST's relationship to field personnel; an overview of emergency agencies; communications equipment and functions; proper and correct telephone and dispatching procedures and techniques; federal, state, and local

communication rules; emergency situations and operating procedures; and human relations skills.

Courses are taught by certified PSTs and meet the educational requirements for the Florida Department of Health's 911 Emergency Dispatcher Certification.

For more information

about the Public Safety Communication program, contact Michael Austin, coordinator of SFSC's criminal justice program, at 863-784-7282 or michael.austin@southflorida.edu.

About South Florida State College

SFSC is a comprehensive, open-access, higher education institution dedicated to providing a student-centered environment focused on learning and personal enrichment through quality programs and services. At its campuses in DeSoto, Hardee, and Highlands counties and through its online presence, the College offers certificates, associate degrees, and bachelor's degrees that lead to the continued success of its graduates and a variety of opportunities for the educational, cultural, and economic advancement of the service district. SFSC is one of the 28 institutions of the Florida College System.

SFSC dean appointed to Florida Board of Nursing

SPECIAL TO HIGHLANDS
NEWS-SUN

AVON PARK — Michele Heston, dean of health sciences at South Florida State College (SFSC), has been appointed by Gov. Rick Scott to serve on the Florida Center for Nursing board of directors. Heston was recommended to serve by the State Board of Education. Her term began on May 11 and will conclude on June 30, 2020.

In 2001, the Florida legislature established the Florida Center for Nursing to recommend solutions to combat Florida's nursing shortage. The board of the Florida Center for Nursing is comprised of community leaders who have the experience and

expertise to improve health care throughout Florida.

"The Florida Center for Nursing is the definitive source for information, research, and strategies addressing the dynamic nurse workforce needs in Florida," said Heston. "The Center's mission, 'to strategically address the issues of nursing supply and demand to meet the needs of health care consumers in Florida,' aligns with the work of the health sciences division at South Florida State College. I look forward to working with Mary Lou Brunell, the executive director, and my fellow board members to assist in the ongoing development of a caring

workforce. It is truly an honor to be appointed by Governor Scott to participate in this important work at the statewide level."

SFSC currently offers an online Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN); an Associate of Science in Nursing to become a Registered Nurse (RN); an Associate of Science in Nursing to transition from Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) to RN, and an occupational certificate in practical nursing.

For more information about SFSC's nursing program, contact Sara McGann, health science specialist at SFSC, at 863-784-7027 or sara.mcgann@southflorida.edu.



COURTESY PHOTO

Michele Heston being sworn in as a member of the Board of the Florida Center for Nursing. From left: June Fisher, Avon Park City Manager; Heston and Juana Ayala, interim Avon Park City Clerk.

Air National Guard Band of the South at SFSC tonight

SPECIAL TO HIGHLANDS
NEWS-SUN

The Air National Guard Band of the South will perform one free public concert at the 1,460-seat Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts on the Highlands Campus of South Florida State College (SFSC) located at 600 West College Drive in Avon Park on Wednesday, June 27 at 7 p.m. Tickets are required for the event and are available online at sfscarts.org. There is

limit of four tickets per household.

The Air National Guard Band of the South is stationed at McGhee Tyson Air National Guard Base near Knoxville, Tennessee. The band is the official musical ambassador for the Tennessee Air National Guard.

Supporting the total Air Force and Air National Guard mission in war and peace, the Air National Guard Band of the South inspires patriotism and fosters a



COURTESY PHOTO

The Air National Guard Band of the South will perform at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts tonight.

deep appreciation of the rich history and legacy

of the Air Force. This support is accomplished,

mainly, through professional performances by some of the nation's best musicians. The band performs as a concert band, ceremonial band, "Space A" and "Sound Barrier" popular music ensembles, "Smooth Groove" jazz/big band ensemble, brass quintets, and as a small jazz combo.

The Band of the South's Concert Band is comprised of some of the most talented musicians in the Southeast region. This is the largest

ensemble which serves as the primary performing unit. The Concert Band has provided musical entertainment throughout Tennessee, Mississippi, Arkansas, Kentucky, Virginia, North Carolina, Alaska, Florida, Maine and the Dominican Republic. They also provide musical support for the staff and personnel at McGhee-Tyson Air Base.

Their selections include patriotic music, marches, concert selections, as well as jazz.