

B10 The Herald-Advocate, January 9, 2020

# SFSC Alumnus Gene Reynolds Pays It Forward In Baseball

## By DEBORAH BELL LATTER

Special To The Herald-Advocate

South Florida State College (SFSC) alumnus, Gene Reynolds, started playing baseball when he was 4 years old. Like many boys, he joined a Little League team and dreamed of becoming a professional baseball player. He played baseball in high school, was recruited by college teams, and professional baseball followed. However, the need to serve others called more strongly.

Reynolds is now the head coach and director of baseball operations at the Georgia Premier Academy in Statesboro, Ga.

Along with Academy director, Tony Ross, Reynolds founded the Academy in 2017 to pass along his knowledge and experience, providing young men, ages 13 to 19, with exceptional baseball development and training.

Students who come from around the world have committed to the Academy's focus on faith, education, and baseball. As a result, his students have gone on to play college and professional baseball. In fact, one former student was the No. 24 pick in the professional baseball draft in 2019.

Reynolds played shortstop for the SFSC Panthers during Rick Hitt's first two seasons as baseball coach at the College and earned an Associate in Arts in May 2001.

He was recruited to play baseball at the University of Tampa and earned his Bachelor of Science in Management in 2003. Professional baseball came along, and he was drafted in the ninth round by the Colorado Rockies in 2003.

Reynolds played within the Rockies organization for a year before returning home to coach for two years at Faith Baptist Christian School, a school associated with Faith Baptist Church in Brandon. The church was founded by Reynolds' father, Henry Eugene Reynolds Sr.

Hitt, now baseball coach and athletics director at SFSC, said that the College signed seven of the 12 baseball players recruited from Georgia Premier Academy over the years.

Other colleges in the Florida College System have signed players from the Academy—Polk State College, State College of Florida-Manatee/Sarasota, St. Petersburg College, and College of Central Florida. The University of South Florida and University of Central Florida are only two of the many universities that have signed players from the Academy.

Reynolds spreads the word about SFSC with firsthand knowledge—the quality of the College, its baseball coach, and its professors. He cherishes what he learned from Coach Hitt and carries forth those lessons.

“He held us accountable and taught us discipline, not only in baseball, but in life,” Reynolds said. “It was an opportunity to play baseball and bring back something to the com-

munity—to leave a legacy that's continued for 18 years.”

Hitt said that Reynolds finds strength in his faith and he sets a good example for other people to follow. As a student-athlete, Reynolds was competitive, determined, and a peer leader—the type of person who would encourage teammates to be the best players and people they could be. He now provides young men opportunities in baseball that they may not otherwise have and nurtures them to become fine young men and good citizens.

“I got to experience something that a small percentage of guys who play baseball in high school and college experience—getting drafted and playing professional baseball,” Reynolds said. “My parents always taught me that it's better to give than receive. I felt like the Lord kind of changed my path. And He has. I've enjoyed it—seeing my players either get drafted or sign college scholarships. It's been very rewarding.”

*Deborah Bell Latter is the coordinator of internal communications at South Florida State College and can be reached at 863-784-7251 or [Deborah.Latter@southflorida.edu](mailto:Deborah.Latter@southflorida.edu).*



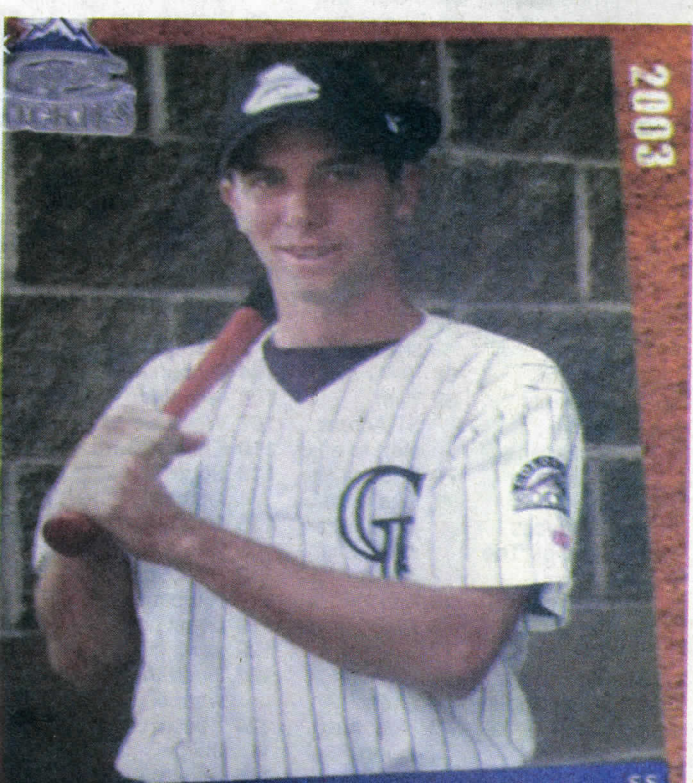
COURTESY PHOTO

**SFSC alumnus Gene Reynolds now heads the baseball program at the Georgia Premier Academy in Statesboro, Ga.**



**Gene Reynolds as a baseball player for the South Florida State College Panthers.**

2003



GENE REYNOLDS

SS

CASPER ROCKIES

**Once a SFSC Panther, Gene Reynolds went on to place professional baseball for the Rockies organization.**

# Ultralight Sport Aviation Forum Jan. 28 At SFSC

By **DEBORAH BELL LATTER**

Special To The Herald-Advocate

South Florida State College (SFSC) will host an Ultralight Sport Aviation Forum on Tuesday, Jan. 28, from 6 to 8 p.m., in Building B, Room 112, on the SFSC Highlands Campus at 600 West College Drive in Avon Park.

Guest speaker, George Karamitis, will discuss the Federal Aviation Regulations (FAR-103) that govern the operation of ultralight vehicles in the United States and the National Airspace System.

He will also cover pre-flight procedures and present video footage and photographs from actual flights.

In the United States, ultralights are classified by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) as single seat vehicles, with a maximum empty weight of 254 lbs. if powered with an engine, a maximum empty weight of 155 lbs. if not engine powered, have a five-gallon maximum fuel capacity, have a maximum full powered flight speed of 55 knots or 63 miles per hour, and a maximum power off stall speed at 24 knots or 27 miles per hour.

The FAA describes them as “ultralight vehicles” and not as aircraft—they are not required to be registered nor is the pilot required to have a pilot’s license.

“The movement into ultralighting started in the late 1970s and early 1980s and has come

back in popularity,” Karamitis said. “Today, ultralights are flown by a lot of pilots who fly small planes and jets but are looking for something fun and more economical to fly. The ultralight is not a machine to fly from point A to B, rather, it’s getting up in the air and flying locally. I’ve owned regular small airplanes all my life and owned several ultralights. Now, I prefer to fly my ultralight. I want to make people more aware of the availability of ultralighting—the simplicity and fun that can be had by flying them—and that they can be flown safely.”

Karamitis is a retired TWA captain. He holds an Airline Transport Pilot (ATP) certificate, the highest level aircraft pilot certificate awarded, with B-727 and B-747 type ratings. He has also been a certified flight instructor for 51 years. In 2013, Karamitis received the Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award for having over 50 years of accident-, incident-, and citation-free flight.

The Ultralight Sport Aviation Forum is free to attend.

To register or for information, call the SFSC Corporate and Community Education Department at 863-784-7388.

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COURTESY PHOTO

**South Florida State College will host an Ultralight Sport Aviation Forum on Jan. 28.**



# SPORTS

• LOCAL • STATE • NATIONAL

Thursday, January 16, 2020

SECTION B

## Gold sponsors return to Heartland Games

By **NEIL SIMPSON**

HEARTLAND GAMES AMBASSADOR

South Florida State College has been coordinating the Heartland Senior Games for more than two decades. Last year more than 500 people competed in one or more of the 13 events offered. Thanks to the financial support of many local sponsors, shirts are provided to all participants, hundreds of medals are awarded and a complimentary lunch is provided at most of the events.

Once again, SFSC is pleased to have Drs. Thakkar, Patel, Avalos and Ferretti return as gold sponsors of the Heartland Senior Games.

These gastroenterology specialists are well-known throughout the community for their medical skills and their charitable giving.

Dr. Vinod Thakkar was the founding member of the practice and has been serving Sebring residents for 40 years. He was joined in the practice by Dr. P.J. Patel some 16 years ago. Dr. Martin Avalos signed on with the team 11 years ago and Dr. Francesco Ferretti came on board six months ago.

The connection with the Senior Games is a good fit as the doctors have made it their mission to support the community that they serve. As well, each has an interest in sports. Dr. Thakkar is an avid

tennis player who can be found playing at the Thakkar Tennis Center on a regular basis. Dr. Patel competes in Ultimate Frisbee, tennis and pickleball. Soccer, biking and running are the activities favored by Dr. Avalos while Dr. Ferretti enjoys golf.

Keeping fit and encouraging their staff to do the same is important to the doctors. Even though they would lose patients if people paid closer attention to their eating habits and fitness routines, a healthier population would be welcomed by all four.

The doctors recommend striving



NEIL SIMPSON PHOTO

From left; Dr. Vinod Thakkar, Dr. P.J. Patel, Dr. Martin Avalos and Dr. Francesco Ferretti.

need to play them so nothing surprises us in the district.”

Tumblin led the Blue Streaks with 26 points and Dewberry led the Red Devils with 28.

Sebring will be heading to Punta Gorda to play in the Wally Keller Classic this Friday and Saturday.

Avon Park will host the DeSoto Bulldogs on Friday in a district matchup with tip-off set for 7:30 p.m.

# GAMES

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for a balanced diet high in fiber, eating less food at each sitting, avoiding fatty foods and eliminating smoking and alcohol combined with more exercise to increase metabolism which would help greatly to improve circulation and reduce obesity.

Playing any of the sports in the Heartland Senior Games (bowling, cycling, golf, pickleball,

shuffleboard, swimming, table tennis or tennis) for an hour or more on a regular basis will get the adrenaline going, free the mind of stress and improve metabolism. Taking part in the Games other events (bridge, euchre, mah jongg) will help to keep the mind active.

Any man or woman aged 50 or older is encouraged to register for the Senior Games. The \$25.00 entry fee allows participants to compete in as many of

the events as desired and, as mentioned above, includes a dri-fit shirt, lunch at most events and a good chance to take home medals which are awarded to the top three in each five year age/gender group.

For the first time, registration can be completed online by visiting [www.southflorida.edu/heartlandgames](http://www.southflorida.edu/heartlandgames).

Registrations must be received at the college at least two weeks prior to the first event in which a competitor is entered.

# SFSC Showcases An Environmental History Of Modern Florida

By **DEBORAH BELL LATTER**

Special To The Herald-Advocate

Through a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) grant, Dr. Gary R. Mormino will present "Florida Dreams Amid the Storms: An Environmental History of Modern Florida" on Thursday, Jan. 30, at 4 p.m., in Building B, Room 204, on the South Florida State College (SFSC) Highlands Campus in Avon Park.

The presentation is free and open to SFSC faculty, high school and college/university educators, and museum and archive professionals.

Others who are interested in attending should email Dr. Charlotte Pressler, SFSC professor of English and humanities, at [presslerc@southflorida.edu](mailto:presslerc@southflorida.edu).

Dr. Mormino will present an environmental overview of Florida and plans to discuss the eco-system of the Lake Wales Ridge.

The Lake Wales Ridge runs approximately 150 miles, from Highlands County in the south through Lake County in the north, and provides habitat for 21 federally listed plant species, many of which are found nowhere else on Earth.

Dr. Mormino is the Frank E. Duckwall professor emeritus of Florida history at the University of South Florida (USF) St. Petersburg and the scholar in residence at the Florida Humanities Council. He is the recipient of the 2015 Florida Lifetime Achievement Award for Writing.

Two decades ago, he began to research a social history of modern Florida. Published in 2005, his book, "Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Modern Florida," follows the rapid development and growth of Florida in the 20th century. Dr. Mormino has written several op-eds for the Tampa Bay Times that urge Floridians to help restore and preserve the state's natural environment.

He received his Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina and began teaching at USF in 1977. In 2003, the Florida Humanities Council named him its first Humanist of the Year.

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## 'That Golden Girls Show!' At SFSC

By **DEBORAH BELL LATTER**

Special To The Herald-Advocate

The off-Broadway hit comedy, *That Golden Girls Show! A Puppet Parody* is scheduled for one performance on Tuesday, Jan. 21 at 1:30 p.m. at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts on South Florida State College's (SFSC) Highlands Campus in Avon Park.

"Travel back to Miami circa 1985 and get ready to laugh with Blanche, Rose, Dorothy, and Sophia," said Cindy Garren, director of cultural programs at SFSC. "The girls scheme, fight, hunt for love, and hurl one-liners at each other."

*That Golden Girls Show! A Puppet Parody* is a brand-new show that parodies classic Golden Girls moments - with puppets! Get set for an evening

of cheesecake, laughter, jazzercise, shoulder pads, sex, and the elegant art of the quick-witted put down.

From Sophia's get-rich-quick schemes, to Rose's tales from St. Olaf, Blanche's insatiable hunt for men and the Fountain of Youth, and Dorothy's daily struggle to make sense of her life and keep her roommates in check.

Devoted fans will fondly remember our four girls from Miami, and for the first-timers, this will be a joyful introduction to the brilliance of that television series. Expect adult themes and language.

Tickets are \$17, \$19, and \$23. Groups of 13 receive a 20% discount. Tickets are available online at [sfscARTS.org](http://sfscARTS.org) or by calling the SFSC Box Office at 863-784-7178. The box office is located

at 600 West College Drive in Avon Park.

The Matinee Series at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts also includes these upcoming performances: Fabulous Equinox Orchestra on Jan. 28, Broadway Tonite on Feb. 4; Splish Splash: Bobby Darin Tribute on Feb. 11; The Florida Orchestra on Feb. 18; Central Park Revisited: James Taylor Tribute on Feb. 25; Tamburitzans on March 3; Changes in Latitude Jimmy Buffet tribute on March 10, and Phil Dirt and the Dozers rock and roll tribute on March 24.

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| January 24, 2020

# Sebring High School student receives Take Stock in Children Leaders 4 Life Scholarship



COURTESY PHOTO

**Jamie Bateman, executive director of institutional advancement for South Florida State College; Danielle Ochoa, coordinator for Take Stock in Children; Jacob O'Neil, Leaders 4 Life Scholarship Winner; Linda Roman, college success coach for Take Stock in Children; and Dr. Tom Leitzel, president of South Florida State College.**



## Special to the Highlands News-Sun

AVON PARK – At the annual South Florida State College (SFSC) Foundation Christmas Luncheon on Thursday, Dec. 5, Jacob O’Neil was surprised when he opened the letter that announced he had won a Take Stock in Children (TSIC) \$40,000 Leaders 4 Life Scholarship from the Asofsky Family Foundation. The crowd gave O’Neil a standing ovation for his accomplishment and expression of gratitude.

O’Neil was one of six students statewide who received the scholarship, an award that covers non-tuition expenses such as housing, books, and transportation. His tuition will be covered by a separate TSIC scholarship. O’Neil was eligible for the scholarship because of his participation in the local TSIC program. The program matches students at-risk of not completing high school with mentors who guide them toward earning their high school diplomas and onto college with scholarships in hand.

The Leaders 4 Life Scholarship is an initiative of the Asofsky Family Foundation, which supports programs aimed at helping the state’s youth. The foundation awards the scholarship in partnership with TSIC. The SFSC Foundation is the lead agency for TSIC within the college’s service district of Highlands, DeSoto, and Hardee counties.

“As Jacob read aloud to a room full of people that he was a 2020 Leaders 4 Life winner, his voice cracked, his eyes teared, and so did mine,” said

Danielle Ochoa, student services coordinator for the local TSIC program. “Always gracious, he recognized his mentor’s weekly visits for the last five years and thanked the room for their support of the Take Stock in Children program. I could not be more proud of Jacob, his incredible work ethic, and awesome determination to chase his goals.”

“When I received the Leaders 4 Life Scholarship I was simply overwhelmed with emotion,” O’Neil said. “I was relieved, ecstatic, nostalgic, and most of all, grateful. I realized that having a purposeful and productive college life would be possible because I wouldn’t spend the whole time working to pay every bill I had. Leaders 4 Life has shown me kindness and given me opportunities I never thought I would have.”

O’Neil graduates from Sebring High School in May 2020 and plans to earn a bachelor’s degree through the University of South Florida’s (USF) MUMA College of Business. His ultimate goal is to join the U.S. Marines as an officer and become a member of the Marine Recon unit. Because USF offers an ROTC program for each of the armed services, O’Neil would like to enter its Marine ROTC program to prepare him for life in the military.

Since the inception of the Leaders 4 Life program, the local Take Stock program has had 13 finalists and, of those, seven have gone on to become winners of the \$40,000 non-tuition scholarship. O’Neil is the 14th finalist and eighth winner.