

94 (years) and sprucing up for more

Sunday, November 1, 2020



MARC VALERO/STAFF

The South Florida State College Foundation, owner of The Hotel Jacaranda, is in the planning stages of prioritizing the needs of the historic hotel and identifying ways to help offset the costs.

SFSC Foundation prioritizing The Hotel Jacaranda's needs

By MARC VALERO
STAFF WRITER

AVON PARK — At holiday time or anytime, The Hotel Jacaranda takes you back to a period when hotels had a grandeur that can't ever be replicated in modern times.

While the Jacaranda's splendor remains after all these years the time has come for the periodic attention it needs to remain as a historic landmark in Avon Park and Highlands County.

The South Florida State College Foundation owns and operates the Jacaranda Hotel at 19 E. Main St.

SFSC Executive Director of Institutional Advancement Jamie Bateman informed the District Board of Trustees in September that following a special Executive Committee and Foundation Board meeting, a committee was formed comprised of six Board Members.

The committee has been charged with identifying options of offsetting costly needs at The Hotel Jacaranda that were brought to the Foundation Board's attention during the August board meeting.

Bateman noted some of the needs of the structure included: plumbing, electrical, entryways, dorm remodels, fire escapes, telephone system rewiring, replacement of upper roof and kitchen roof area and the elevator needs replacement.

She told the Board of Trustees the estimated cost is about \$1.3 million.

Bateman said the committee will review the areas of need and will begin to build a plan that may include fundraising, campaigns, and/or alternative funding to assist with the remodel.

Highlands News-Sun checked with SFSC on the effort to make repairs and



MARC VALERO/STAFF

The Hotel Jacaranda in Avon Park has an estimated \$1.3 million in renovation and repair needs.



FILE PHOTO

The holiday decorations at The Hotel Jacaranda are always popular with tourists and residents alike.

improvements at the Hotel Jacaranda
The college responded: The SFSC

Foundation, owner of The Hotel Jacaranda, recognizes the importance of maintaining the facility and making improvements to keep it up to date. The "Grand Lady," as it is known, is a showpiece for downtown Avon Park.

The Foundation Board recognizes that to maintain the facility, there are certain repairs and upgrades that are necessary, and that is exactly what is happening in order to preserve the elegance and charm of this 94-year-old facility.

"We are currently in the planning stages of prioritizing the needs The Hotel Jacaranda has and identifying ways to help offset the costs that will be associated with those needs," Bateman said. "Our SFSC Foundation board has instructed a Jacaranda Planning Committee to come up with prioritized phased tasks and timelines, and they are in the process of doing so."

CENTER

FROM PAGE 1A

In 1988 the SFSC Foundation bought and renovated the Hotel Jacaranda to serve as student housing (for out of county student athletes), as an events venue for college and public activities and as a teaching laboratory for Culinary and Hospitality Management students.

The 1920s-era Mediterranean-Revival designed hotel has served guests such as Al Capone, Clark Gable and the 1927 New York Yankees.

The Hotel Jacaranda is named for a 150-year-old tree that stood on the site.

To contact the SFSC Foundation: phone: 863-453-3133 or email: foundation@southflorida.edu.



COURTESY PHOTO/CHRISTI BOBO

The South Florida State College Panthers celebrate after placing fourth at the NJCAA Regional Championship in Tallahassee.

Lady Panther place high at Regionals

Special to the Highlands News-Sun

The South Florida State College Lady Panther Cross Country team traveled to Tallahassee last Friday, to compete in the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) Region 8 championship. The Panthers ran the challenging Apalachee Regional Park course.

South Florida, ran in their coolest environment to date, 50 degrees at race time, had an outstanding showing placing 3 of their 6 runners in the Top 17 spots. Francesca Chillemi, led the way for the Panthers with a time of 22:03 placing her in 10th overall

and was followed by Claire Darrin who came in 12th and Tatiana Mier finished in 17th to pace the Panthers. Kareli Plata, Ruby Eller and Arianna Bullington competed hard for the Panthers to help solidify the 4th place finish.

Next stop for the 13th ranked Lady Panthers will be the NJCAA National Championships in Ft. Dodge Iowa on Nov. 14th.

Coach Bobo explained, "These ladies get up, shown up, and work hard. Now the reward is at the finish line. I am excited to see what they do with the next two weeks."



COURTESY PHOTO/CHRISTI BOBO

South Florida State College's Francesca Chillemi sprints past the competition during the NJCAA Regional Championship.



MARC VALERO/STAFF

While most of Florida's State Colleges have a drop in enrollment, South Florida State College is currently experiencing an increase in enrollment for its credit and post-secondary degree programs.

SFSC enrollment up while Florida sees a big drop

By **MARC VALERO**
STAFF WRITER

AVON PARK — Reversing historical trends during economic downturns, state college enrollment has dropped dramatically as the coronavirus pandemic continues to plague Florida, but South Florida State College has an enrollment increase in its credit and post-secondary degree programs.

Student enrollment is down between 5 and 10% at most of Florida's 28 state colleges, according to St. Johns River State College President Joe Pickens, who serves as chairman of the college system's Council of Presidents.

The biggest drop is among first-time college students who have recently graduated from high school, Pickens, a former state legislator, told The News Service of Florida.

College campuses were largely shuttered following a statewide shutdown ordered by Gov. Ron DeSantis in March to prevent the spread of the virus. The schools are now offering a mix of online and in-person classes.

South Florida State College (SFSC) is currently experiencing positive enrollment for its credit, post-secondary degree programs for the fall 2020 term. The college is up 2% from last year at this time with 57% of current students attending in person and 38% online with 5% in hybrid courses, which are a combination of online and in-person instruction.

Two fully online degrees, Bachelor of Applied Science in Supervision and Management and the Bachelor of Science in Nursing, are both up 19% and 43.5%, respectively. The Associate in

SFSC FROM PAGE 1A

attend college courses, is up 13.4% for those seeking an associate or baccalaureate degree.

Adult Education at South Florida State College is currently one area that is down in enrollment. Within Adult Education, the General Education Development (GED) program, Adult Basic Education (ABE), and English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses are free to attend for anyone in the community who requires the instruction.

Courses are offered at SFSC's Lake Placid Center, Highlands Campus, and Hardee Campus, and First United Methodist Church in Sebring.

Due to the pandemic, the Adult Education course format was not easily available to the students through an online modality considering the lack of a computer and limited internet connectivity. Adult Education staff are continually enrolling students

depending on their needs and accommodations.

Florida's enrollment numbers track closely to a national trend, according to a survey by the National Student Clearinghouse. The survey, released in October, found that undergraduate enrollment nationwide had dropped by more than 4% in the fall semester, compared to last year. State colleges were hit the hardest, with a decrease of 9.4 percent, the survey found.

Many people predicted that the coronavirus pandemic and the economic fallout would create a surge in state college enrollment, because colleges are a more affordable and closer alternative than universities for many students, as occurred during the recession from 2007 to 2009.

"But we're not seeing that at all. In fact, we're seeing dramatic declines in enrollment," Martha Parham, a senior vice president and spokeswoman for the American Association of Community Colleges, told

State college are a little older university student majority of the and about 15% parents, according to Parham.

While there's available yet to the drop in college students, experience Parham offer a reasons.

Many older students who haven't lost might be juggling from home and to schoolchildren engaged in distancing, while struggles make ends meet work students might be able to afford and fees.

Having numerous members of a household working or classes online causes broadband issues for older students a comfortable with instruction. Students might be waiting on sidelines rather than risking being exposed to the highly contagious virus and infectious members.

The News Service of Florida contributed

Bautista employs his passion for education and community

Special to Highlands News-Sun

PROVIDED BY SFSC

AVON PARK — Eric Bautista was the first person in his family to graduate from college. Although an excellent student throughout high school and college, he understood, firsthand, the struggle that students sometimes face at home and financially. As an alumnus of South Florida State College (SFSC), he wants to change people's lives and build leaders. Because of his passion for education and sense of community, Bautista has helped dual enrollment students in DeSoto County continue their education and intends to do much more in the future.

During summer 2020, 12 dual enrollment students from DeSoto High School wanted to continue their college courses at SFSC. SFSC's dual enrollment program allows eligible students in



BAUTISTA

ability to simultaneously earn high school and college credit toward a degree or certificate. The students receive free

college tuition and free textbooks.

Asena Mott, director of the SFSC DeSoto Campus, said, "We have a conundrum regarding our high school seniors whenever they want to finish their education. All through their dual enrollment experience, their classes have been paid for — books, tuition, fees, everything. But they may need to take summer classes to finish up their degree, whether it's vocational or credit classes."

In 2020, the SFSC summer session began on May 4 and the dual enrollment students wouldn't graduate from high school until May 26. Because their summer college classes

high school graduation date, the students were classified as "traditional" students and were no longer eligible for monies available to dual enrollment students. Financial aid through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is only available to students who have earned a high school diploma.

So, Mott approached the DeSoto County Education Foundation (DCEF) to see if it could assist the 12 students in their efforts to obtain financial aid. Sarah Walker, DCEF director, sent out requests to donors for assistance, and the positive response was overwhelming. The money donated and disbursed to the students for summer classes totaled \$6,281.52. Of that amount, approximately \$3,500 came through a personal donation from SFSC alumnus Bautista.

"I was introduced to the dual enrollment program when I was in high school," Bautista said. "So

for high school students."

Bautista, born and raised in Arcadia, had been a dual enrollment student from DeSoto High School and graduated from SFSC with an Associate in Arts in 2012. He went on to earn his bachelor's degree in accounting with a minor in economics from the University of South Florida (USF) in December 2014. Currently, he is the vice chair of the SFSC Alumni Association.

Bautista originally wanted to study to become a lawyer, but changed course and turned to accounting and, eventually, became a Certified Public Accountant (CPA). "Accounting is the language of business, so I felt that it was the best place for me to get my foot in the door," he said. Upon graduation, he was offered a position with the international accounting firm, Ernst & Young, in its Tampa office. "I was at Ernst & Young for about four years working as a

Then, two years ago, I came back to Arcadia."

Bautista is currently the vice president of a local roofing company. He said that he wants to do more for the community, such as provide more jobs. "Each job that's provided is a local family that's being taken care of," he said. "And the money stays in the community."

His concerns for the community extend to educating young people. "I know the benefits of an education and the job opportunities I got. I want to let them know that 'you can get the degree, you can get a better job if you aspire to it and stay motivated. Let me encourage you, let me walk you through it. If you need someone to listen to, I'll be that person. I'll help bounce back ideas.' I want to be a role model, if possible, and a friend to them. If they come to me with questions, I'm available and I can help them."

A program that Bautista

with is Take Stock in Children, a statewide program that provides at-risk children with a mentor and a college scholarship. In return, Take Stock scholars sign contracts in which they promise to remain drug-free, to avoid behavior that would get them into trouble with law enforcement, to attend school regularly, and to earn satisfactory grades. The SFSC Foundation serves as the lead agency for Take Stock in DeSoto, Hardee, and Highlands counties.

Besides the donation for the 12 dual enrollment students, Bautista has personally provided four scholarships of \$500 each to students in the last two years. His passion for education is so deep that he convinced the company he works for to partner with the DCEF in providing young people with educational scholarships. "Between myself and my employer, we've sponsored 19 kids," he said. "So, that's about \$10,000 in scholar-

News

College renews USF Guaranteed Admissions Program

Special to Highlands News-Sun Courtesy SFSC

Nov 16, 2020

AVON PARK — South Florida State College (SFSC) and the University of South Florida (USF) announced the renewal of their partnership in the Fuse guaranteed admissions program. SFSC is one of eight Florida College System institutions to renew its partnership with USF. Entering its fifth year, Fuse provides a seamless and timely degree path for FCS students to transfer to USF. Students are guaranteed admission into specific majors at USF, provided they meet certain criteria such as earning an associate degree in less than three years and maintaining at least a 2.0 GPA.

“The University of South Florida is proud to join our partners in the Florida College System to continue support of this important program,” USF President Steve Currall said. “The Fuse program provides students a critical pathway to graduation and supports our region and state by growing the pool of workforce talent.”

The pathway degree programs available vary by FCS institution based on the local market employment trends and student interests. Students accepted into the Fuse program attend a special FSC/USF orientation in their first year to introduce them into the USF community and have access to resources from both schools, including Fuse scholarships, advising, academic services, activities, and sporting events, while obtaining their associate degree.

Over 1,500 students are currently enrolled in the Fuse program, with nearly 250 of those enrolled at USF. Another 26 students have completed the program and graduated from USF since it was first introduced.

“I was part of the Fuse program at SFSC and am able to continue my education as an interdisciplinary social science major at USF,” said Taylor Bateman, SFSC Class of 2020.

Fuse was piloted in fall 2016 with 40 students starting at Hillsborough Community College and St. Petersburg College. The program has expanded to include: College of Central Florida, Pasco-Hernando State College, Polk State College, Santa Fe College, South Florida State College, and State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota.

For more information about the Fuse program at SFSC, visit southflorida.edu/current-students/transfer-opportunities.

News

Joan Hartt inducted into SFSC Foundation Legacy Society

Special to Highlands News-Sun Courtesy SFSC

Nov 17, 2020

- AVON PARK — During the South Florida State College (SFSC) Foundation Showcase and Fundraiser on Saturday, Oct. 24, Joan Hartt was inducted into the 2020 Legacy Society for her service to the Foundation and to the College. Jamie Bateman, SFSC executive director of institutional advancement, and Darrell Jensen, SFSC Foundation vice president, made the presentation.

"Because of our donors, we have been able to provide countless student scholarships and other means to support SFSC," Bateman said. "The Legacy Society was established to recognize those donors who have gone above and beyond in supporting SFSC and our Foundation."

This is the second year that such an honor has taken place. Joe Davis Jr. and his wife, Gloria Davis, were inducted into The Legacy Society in 2019.

Hartt has served the Foundation and the college for several years. In 1999, she was appointed to the SFSC District Board of Trustees, a position that she held until 2011. She currently serves on the SFSC Foundation Board of Directors.

"I can't think of anybody more deserving for this wonderful recognition than my dear friend Joan Hartt," said Dr. Catherine P. Cornelius, SFSC president emerita. "She's been such a stalwart supporter of our college for 35 years or so. She gives of her time, she gives of her talent, she gives of her wonderful advice, and also, of course, her financial contributions have been a great asset to the college. Joanie also provides all the decorations for the SFSC Foundation Christmas Luncheons and the Galas and the other activities that benefit the college, the students, and the Foundation. In addition to all her other wonderful donations, she has established a scholarship in memory of her son, Ralph."

But Hartt's most visible contribution has been the time and care she has taken in decorating the Hotel Jacaranda in Avon Park. Since 2007, Hartt, her daughters-in-law, and a team of volunteers have transformed the hotel into a holiday wonderland at Christmastime and continued that labor of love into the fall and spring. In 2015, Hartt and her daughters-in-law began re-decorating 20 guest rooms on the second and third floors of the hotel. Each room has been decorated with its own theme.

"At Christmastime, it takes us about 10 days to decorate the hotel," said Sheila Hartt, who assists in decorating the Jacaranda. "My mother-in-law loves this hotel and she loves Highlands County. When she was growing up, her father was a hotel manager in Sebring. I think this has just always been in her blood. And she just loves it. It brings her a lot of joy in making people smile."

"We're blessed to have Joan Hartt come to the Hotel Jacaranda and decorate," said David Brunns, Hotel Jacaranda general manager. "We have tons of guests that come by and want to see the different changes of season. Soon we'll be decorating for Christmas. Everyone comes in and takes holiday pictures with their families. It's all because of Joan and her helpers."

Thanksgiving meals available in Highlands

November 18, 2020

By **KIM MOODY**
STAFF WRITER

SEBRING — It's almost time to don the buffet pants and tuck into turkey dinners with all the fixings. Despite COVID, the Thanksgiving holiday will arrive. Traditionally, several organizations throughout the county offer free meals and locations to fellowship.

This year, the meals will still be available but the fellowship won't be. Companionship will have to come from family. Several organizations said the need for meals will be even greater this year.

Nu-Hope Elder Care Services will be providing meals for 200 senior citizens with a Drive-Thru Thanksgiving Celebration from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. today (Wednesday, Nov. 18). The dinner location is at Sebring Christian Church at 4514 Hammock Road.

"We are so very grateful to have Duke Energy as the sponsor of the Thanksgiving drive-thru dinner," Nu-Hope's Ingra Gardner said. "Though the venue has changed this year, we want to foster a sense of normalcy for seniors in our community. We want them to know they are not alone during these challenging



FILE PHOTO

Trudy Crawford enjoyed her Thanksgiving meal and apple pie during the Nu-Hope Thanksgiving Dinner last year.

times."

Dr. John Pepper used his office in Sebring as a drop off center for food donations for Nu-Hope's Thanksgiving dinner.

"We at Pepper Natural Health and Wellness would like to thank our patients, staff and their families for another successful food drive for our friends at Nu-Hope," Pepper said. "Thank you Lavernia Bueford for coming to pick up our contribution to the community. We have proudly been gathering donations for over 10 years and look forward to continuing this tradition."

For over 20 years, The Salvation Army has fed hundreds and this year will be no exception. In the past, pick up and eating at meal sites was available. Due to

coronavirus, dinners are pick up only. Meals are available from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. or while supplies last on Thanksgiving, Nov. 26. Pick up meals at the Highlands County Sports Complex at 200 Sheriff's Tower Road in Sebring. The Salvation Army staff asks for a call in advance for meals at 863-385-7548x100.

Union Church in Avon Park is planning on serving 750 meals on Nov. 26 at 106 N. Butler Ave. The free meals will be available by pick up or delivered in Avon Park and Frostproof. Organizer Jane Breylinger is seeking volunteers in various positions. She is also in need of pies, but not cream pies as they don't travel well. To volunteer or for more information, call 863-453-3345. Meals will be in to-go containers and volunteers will be wearing gloves and masks and getting temperature checks.

"We normally say 'have a hot meal and a hug' but this year we will say 'have a hot meal and love' because we can't hug," Breylinger said. "It's nice to know people can get a hot meal; it's nice to know you're remembered."

The Holy Trap Ministries is collecting turkeys and other food items associated with Thanksgiving dinner for families in need. Monetary donations and volunteers are welcome. For more information call 863-633-0145 or email theholyptrap@gmail.com.

South Florida's Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society is collecting food to give out to those in need. The Everything but the Turkey food drive runs through Nov. 20. Items can be brought to the Avon Park or Lake Placid campuses. Items being collected are canned veggies, fruit, cranberry sauce, pie filling, pie crust, stuffing, mac 'n cheese, instant potatoes, muffin mix and powdered milk. For more information, call 863-784-7120.



FILE PHOTO

Many organizations that serve Thanksgiving meals have had to change their way of doing things this year due to COVID-19. Most have switched to to-go meals instead.

Highlands_news-sun

Criminal Justice Academy graduates new corrections officers

Special to the Highlands News-Sun Provided by South Florida State College

Nov 19, 2020

AVON PARK, Fla. — South Florida State College (SFSC) graduated 45 new correctional officers on Friday, Nov. 13, at the Highlands Campus in Avon Park. Recognized at the ceremony were four graduates of Class 199, 23 graduates of Class 101, and 18 graduates of Class 102.

Michael Austin, coordinator of SFSC's Criminal Justice Academy, called the cadets to the stage and handed each new corrections officer a certificate.

Class 199 graduates who received certificates were Elizabeth Uriarte (executive officer), Caleb Doolin, Christopher J. Foreman Sr., and Destin Fox.

Class 101 graduates who received certificates were Jennifer Morrison (class leader), William Swisher (executive officer), Christopher Wilkins (first squad leader), Shanekia Jones, Bradley Smeal, Rebecca Hester, Jamelia Gunter, Michael Hansen, Andrew Foard, Raquel Earle (second squad leader), Sara Decker, Jore Stanberry, Lelandra Smith, Rute Macedo, Samantha Mendoza-Lopez (third squad leader), Bobby Guffey Jr., Earl Johnson, Shamice S. Porteous, Bryan Taylor (fourth squad leader), Albree Johnson, Carol Allison, Elizabeth Walwood, and Nicole Peana.

Class 102 graduates who received certificates were Alisha Tuten (class leader), Blake Smith (executive officer), Mathew Sidor (guidon), Joshua Mercer (first squad leader), Teresita Ugarte, Terrance Davis, JaMar Jackson (second squad leader), Michelle Meyers, Alex Jaramillo, Hector Cintron-Colon, James Peach (third squad leader), Monique Johnson, Wesley Roberts, Alissa Durham, Gabe Greseth (fourth squad leader), Melissa Knutson, Hannah Ellis, and Dakota Stevens.

During the ceremony, special awards were presented to the graduates: from Class 199, Elizabeth Uriarte for executive officer; from Class 101, Jennifer Morrison for class leader, William Swisher for executive officer, Shamice Porteous for top academics, and Rute Macedo for top firearms scores; from Class 102, Alisha Tuten for class leader and top firearms scores, Blake Smith for executive officer, and Hannah Ellis for top academics.

To commemorate Veterans Day and the 245th birthday of the U.S. Marine Corps, guest speaker Major Ryan Thomas, of the Hardee Correctional Institution, opened his presentation with a special recognition of those in the audience who served in the armed services. He then offered the graduates words of wisdom: "Everyone leaves behind a legacy, but only a few leave behind a legacy that is worth talking about. A legacy is the story of someone's life, the things that they did, the places they went, the goals they accomplished, and their failures. Legacies are pathways that guide people in making decisions about what to do and what not to do. Legacies can be positive or negative.

"Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. left behind his legacy for positivity and selfless service. Whereas, Adolf Hitler left behind his legacy of negativity and destruction. Both are equally important in serving as examples for the future. Leaving behind a legacy is important no matter who you are. I want to challenge each and every one of you today to leave behind the best legacy you can — a positive path for the coming officers to follow. How will you be remembered? What will your legacy or story say about you?"

Upon successful completion of the SFSC 420 contact-hour Basic Correctional Officer Program, students earn a Career Certificate and are eligible to take the state certification examination to become a certified officer. For more information about this program or any other program offered through the SFSC Criminal Justice Academy, call Austin at 863-784-7282 or email Michael.Austin@southflorida.edu.