



COURTESY PHOTO

Darrell Jensen (left), South Florida State College Foundation vice president; Joan Hartt; and Jamie Bateman, South Florida State College executive director of institutional advancement.

Joan Hartt Inducted Into SFSC Foundation Legacy Society

By DEBORAH BELL LATTER

Special To The Herald-Advocate

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,” said Bateman. “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

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.”

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.

Winter Wonderland



SHARON WEATHERHEAD/CORRESPONDENT

The inside of The Hotel Jacaranda in Avon Park.

Holiday spirit fills The Hotel Jacaranda

By SHARON WEATHERHEAD
CORRESPONDENT

AVON PARK — Avon Park's own 'gracious lady,' The Hotel Jacaranda, was built in the 1920's and is listed on the National Historic Register. Many famous people, including Clark Gable, George Burns, Gracie Allen and Babe Ruth have walked the quiet hallways with their high sculptured ceilings.

The hotel was named for a 150-year-old jacaranda tree that was removed to make way for the property. Among its first guests were baseball players from the St. Louis Cardinals who stayed there during their spring training from 1927-1929.

During World War II, the hotel was home to many servicemen who came to Avon Park to train as military pilots.

South Florida State College Foundation purchased the hotel in 1988 with the intent of preserving its charming historic character. Today, she still stands in



SHARON WEATHERHEAD/CORRESPONDENT

HOTEL | 8A There are plenty of decorations on and around the tree.

HOTEL

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all her glory, coming alive during the Christmas season.

"Joan Hartt was the one who started all the elaborate decorations during the holiday season," explained Carole Chapman, who has worked at the Jacaranda for over 20 years.

"Now there is a team of women led by Joan's daughter-in-law, Shelly, which create the new designs every year. The Hartt family is very involved and love to make people happy."

The decorations start outside on the front porch and continue throughout the lobby, restaurant and the annex. Christmas trees,



SHARON WEATHERHEAD/CORRESPONDENT

The outside is also decorated.

wreaths, poinsettias, old-fashioned toys, Santa and ornaments of every color create a feeling of excitement and warmth.

"They love the color I call 'Christmas red.' Every year the

decorations are rearranged and artfully organized to create a completely different design than the year before. They even move some of the furniture. This year the big sleigh is in the front lobby; last

year it was in the annex.

The lobby showcase a 15-foot tree that is traditional as well as festive. The lobby fireplace is decorated with wreath, garland, nutcrackers and two comfortable chairs inviting you to sit and enjoy the view.

Mr. and Mrs. Santa Claus will be in the lobby from Dec. 1-2. You can take your pictures with Santa, so be sure bring the kids, grandpa and your camera. There will be appropriate social distancing practices.

Santa's hours are 5-7 p.m. Sunday through Friday and 6-8 p.m. Saturday. The Hotel Jacaranda is located 19 E. Main St. in Avon Park. For more information, call 863-453-2200 or visit their website www.hoteljac.com.

SFSC Performing Arts — bringing back entertainment safely

Special to Highlands Sun
AVON PARK — The Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts at South Florida State College (SFSC) reopens on Saturday, Jan. 9, with two performances of the popular Elvis Birthday Bash starring Mike Albert and Scot Bruce.

“We’ve reduced our seating capacity from 1,460 seats to 440,” explained Cindy Garren, director of cultural programs at SFSC. “We will offer two performances of most shows so that we can accommodate 880 people.” Show times for the Elvis Birthday Bash are 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. Tickets begin at \$32 with a \$10 ticket for children and students.

Tickets for all



COURTESY PHOTO

Michael W. Smith.

performances can be purchased as a party of two, three, four, or six.

Limited single tickets are also available. “Each party is socially distanced, so



COURTESY PHOTO

The Modern Gentlemen.

there is no one seated in front, behind, or six feet on either side,” said Garren. “We are following recommendations by the CDC, the Event Safety Alliance, and the Performing Arts Center Consortium Guides to Reopening.”

Several new protocols have been implemented at the Wildstein Center due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Face masks are required, including during the performance and throughout the

venue. Performances will run 75–90 minutes without an intermission. Hand sanitizing stations have been generously positioned throughout the building and the venue will be disinfected and sanitized prior to all performances.

“We will not offer concessions to eliminate movement throughout the building,” added Garren, “Patrons may bring a plastic bottle of water into the theater.” Additional measures

include: hands-free ticketing, physical distancing in all areas, temperature checks for staff, volunteers, and performers, and sanitizing of high-touch areas. A complete list of COVID protocols are listed on the website at sfscARTS.org.

The popular Matinee performances will be offered on most Tuesdays with 10 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. shows. Country music star Jim Stafford;

SFSC

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Ted Vigil's Tribute to John Denver; Shades of Bubl ; Rhinestone Cowboy Memories: A Glen Campbell Tribute; international recording artist Bertie Higgins; Tony Monaco and Turnstiles: A Billy Joel Tribute; America's Sweethearts; Sail On: A Beach Boys tribute; and Chi-Town Transit Authority are scheduled to appear. Tickets begin at \$15.

Due to reduced seating capacity, SFSC Performing Arts is not offering a series subscription package, group sales, or the 5-for-15 discount.

Family friendly performances with a \$10 child/student ticket are: Elvis Birthday Bash; REZA: Edge of Illusion Magic; New Shanghai Circus; the amazing Catapult Shadow Dancers; and Johnny Peers & The Muttville Comix. Tickets begin at \$15 for adults.

Live jazz returns with all performances at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts. Rising jazz vocalist and pianist Tony DeSare, who has been called "two parts young Sinatra and one part Billy Joel," is scheduled for Jan. 21 at 7 p.m. Eddie Metz, Nikki Parrott, and Rossano Sportiello will deliver a swinging set on Feb. 11 at 7 p.m. Stride piano stars Stephanie



COURTESY PHOTO

The Celtic Angels.

Trick and Paolo Alderighi will perform Four Hands, Two Pianos on Feb. 27 at 7 p.m. Tickets begin at \$25.

The Modern Gentlemen, the quartet that backed Frankie Valli for a decade, will present a high energy pop and doo wop concert on Jan. 22. Top selling Christian artist, Michael W. Smith, who sells out shows around the world and has sold over 15 million albums, will appear Feb. 13. ABBA MANIA, the official tribute show that started it all, recreates the music by one of the world's finest pop groups on Feb. 19. Celtic Angels will return for an all-new show with Irish music and dance on March 4. Canadian Brass, the world's most popular

brass quintet, perform on March 10 and March 11 at 7 p.m.

All artists, times, dates, and shows are subject to change and/or cancel. In the event of a cancellation, ticketholders will be notified and issued a refund.

A complete schedule, videos, and ticket information are available online at sfscARTS.org. The SFSC Box Office is open Monday-Friday, 11:30 a.m. -2:30 p.m. The Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts is located on the Highlands Campus of South Florida State College at 600 West College Drive in Avon Park. Parking is free. For more information, call 863-784-7178.



BO HAUNG PHOTO

Canadian Brass will perform on March 10-11 at SFSC.



COURTESY PHOTO

Eddie Metz.

Christmas star to shine bright Monday

By **KIM MOODY**
STAFF WRITER

SEBRING — “Oh, star of wonder, star of night, start with royal beauty bright.” John Henry Hopkins Jr. probably did not realize how appropriate his Christmas carol would be to people in 2020, when he wrote



CHRISTENSEN

“Christmas Star” or “Bethlehem Star” on Monday. The “Christmas Star” will

“We Three Kings” in 1857. Star gazers will witness a rare treat many call the

“Christmas

shine at its peak, just after sunset on Monday, which is coincidentally, the winter solstice in the northern hemisphere.

The word “star” is a bit of a misnomer however, as Monday’s celestial event actually involves planets and not stars at all. Jupiter and Saturn will be closer to each other

than they have been in hundreds of years.

Planets aligning is called a conjunction, because Jupiter and Saturn are the largest planets in our solar system, astronomers call it the “Great Conjunction.” Conjunctions are not rare per se. Some cannot be seen because of they

happen during the day. This conjunction is rare because of the closeness of the two planets. South Florida State College Dean of Applied Sciences and Technologies and astronomer Erik Christensen explained conjunctions.

“The Jupiter-Saturn conjunction happens

once every 20 years; the last one occurred on May 28, 2000. Not all conjunctions are the same. The 2020 great conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn will be the closest since 1623 and the closest observable since 1226,” Christensen said. “The next time this

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STAR

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will happen will be Oct. 31, 2040.”

In space, distance is relative. Christensen explained while the planets look close together, they are still pretty far apart.

“Both Jupiter and Saturn move in elliptical orbits about the Sun, just as Earth does,” he said. “Saturn takes nearly 30 years to go completely around the Sun whereas Jupiter takes nearly 12 years. Thus at various points in their orbit, the two planets are visually aligned and appear together in the sky as observed from Earth. The planets are still millions of miles apart — Jupiter is 548.29 million miles away and Saturn 1.0016 billion miles.”



COURTESY PHOTO/NASA

A view of the night sky on Dec. 21 will show a conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter that astronomers call the ‘great conjunction.’

All planets form conjunctions, according to Christensen, but the Jupiter and Saturn is easier to see because the

planets are so large.

Some astronomers hypothesize another great conjunction is what the three kings followed to find the baby Jesus in the manger in biblical times. A sort of celestial GPS, if you will. Hence the name “Bethlehem Star.”

“In Christian tradition, the Star of Bethlehem, also called the Christmas Star, revealed the birth of Jesus to the Biblical Magi, and later led them to Bethlehem,” he said. “There are many theories as to what this could have

been, these include: a supernova explosion, a comet, conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, stationary point of Jupiter, or a conjunction of Jupiter, Regulus and Venus.”

Christensen said the conjunction can be seen with the naked eye and a telescope or binoculars are not needed. He said the best time to view it is the first hour after sunset and to look west close to the horizon.

“When looking at the night sky, stars twinkle and planets appear as

steady points of light,” he said.

Christensen shared what the conjunction might look like.

“The Dec. 21, 2020 great conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn is already underway and highly conspicuous in the west just after sunset each evening. Just find a spot where you have clear view (no trees or buildings) to the west,” he said. “On Dec. 21, the pair will be only 0.1 degree apart. Some say the pair will look like an elongated star on that date. This will be a highly visual experience and mind-expanding sight that you don’t want to miss.”

Not to worry if viewing the “star” outdoors is not possible. Christensen gave some alternative, virtual ways to enjoy the stellar show.

“If it is cloudy, you can view it online. One good source is The Virtual Telescope Project and its remotely controlled robotic telescopes which can be accessed at virtualtelescope.eu/webtv,” he said.

This event may inspire future astronomers to learn more about the heavens.

“Astronomy is a fascinating subject and hobby. You can start observing with just a pair of binoculars and later transition to a telescope,” he said. “If you are interested in studying more about astronomy, South Florida State College offers AST 1002 Descriptive Astronomy both as an online class and an online lab.”

For more details, contact Christensen at South Florida State College at 863-784-7424 or erik.christensen@southflorida.edu.



BILL INGALLS/NASA VIA AP

In this Sunday, Dec. 13, 2020 photo made available by NASA, Saturn, top, and Jupiter, below, are seen after sunset from Shenandoah National Park in Luray, Va. The two planets are drawing closer to each other in the sky as they head towards a “great conjunction” on Monday, Dec. 21, where the two giant planets will appear a tenth of a degree apart.

College graduates celebrate a milestone

Special to Highlands
News-Sun

COURTESY SFSC

AVON PARK — For South Florida State College (SFSC) graduates who gathered in the Alan Jay Wildstein Theater for the Performing Arts on Thursday, Dec. 17, the 2020 Commencement ceremony was a time to celebrate, while taking precautions during the pandemic. Graduates were honored from both the spring 2020 graduating class and those graduating in December 2020.

Early in the program, Joe Wright, chair of the SFSC Board of Trustees, addressed the graduates by saying, "You are the most prepared class we have ever had." He explained that the Class of 2020 is the class of the pandemic year. "No one can tell you exactly what to do, because we have never seen times like this. You have had to deal with emotional strain and social isolation, face financial hardship, think quickly on your feet, be creative, take risks, and be both flexible and realistic. Completing your college degree in this year's environment has accelerated your maturity in ways you may not fully appreciate for a while. Nevertheless, you persevered. SFSC Class of 2020, you are the most prepared class we have ever had."

The graduates received congratulations and further words of wisdom from Dr. Thomas C. Leitzel, SFSC president. "Today we stand in



COURTESY PHOTO

Approximately 462 students met the SFSC requirements for spring 2020 Commencement. Of these, 21 received their Bachelor of Science in Supervision and Management (BAS-SM), 10 received their Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), 13 received their Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education (BSEE), 205 received their Associate in Arts (A.A.), 73 received their Associate in Science (A.S.), five received their State of Florida High School diplomas and 135 received career certificates and college credit certificates.

unity for the purpose of celebrating accomplishments. It's a unity that we embrace collectively, for today is the culmination of what we do as we uphold the instructional mission of South Florida State College."

Through much of Leitzel's presentation, he emphasized one particular phrase. "You heard me say, 'Keep moving,'" he said. "That is more than just a processional message during Commencement. I truly mean 'keep moving.' Move on to your next opportunity with confidence. Move toward your next academic credential. Move toward that next promotion at work. Move toward the opportunity to make a difference in the world. Just keep moving. Whatever you do, keep moving forward. Be safe. Work hard. Apply the lessons you learned in the classroom and

keep moving."

During the ceremony, Leitzel gave special recognition to two individuals who served the college with excellence and will retire in December. Glenn Little, vice president for administrative services, retires after having served SFSC for 35 years. Dawn Pisarski, professor of nursing, retires after having served the College for 11 1/2 years.

The number of students participating in the December Commencement ceremonies totaled 162.

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COURTESY PHOTO

The graduates at the SFSC 2020 Commencement Ceremony received congratulations and further words of wisdom from Dr. Thomas C. Leitzel, SFSC president.

of Science in Elementary Education (BSEE), 205 received their Associate in Arts (A.A.), 73 received their Associate in Science (A.S.), five received their State of Florida High School diplomas and 135 received career certificates and college credit certificates.

Approximately 255 students will have met the SFSC requirements by December Commencement. Of these, 13 will receive their BAS-SM, one will receive their BSEE, 95 will receive their A.A., 33 receive their A.S., 19 will receive their State of Florida High School diplomas and 94 will receive career certificates and college credit certificates.

The mace bearer and chief marshal for this year's ceremony is Beth Andrews. Marshals are Tom Bohan, Kathleen Cappo, Joan Davies, Rob Hampton, Theresa James, Cindy Kinser, Ricardo Pantoja, Lena Phelps, Andy Polk and Tina

Atchley Appointed To SFSC Trustee Board

Wauchula City Manager Terry Atchley has been appointed to serve on the South Florida State College District Board of Trustees.

Governor Ron DeSantis made the announcement on Dec. 23.

The appointment fills a vacancy on the District Board of Trustees left with the death earlier this year of Ken Lambert, a former realtor and city commissioner and mayor of Wauchula.

Atchley is a former Hardee County Commissioner and has volunteered his time with the Hardee County Chamber of Commerce, South Florida State College Foundation, Hardee County Education Foundation, Hardee County Fair, Hardee County Rotary Club and the Kiwanis Club of Wauchula.

He is also the co-owner of Giovanni's Main Street Kitchen.

Other Appointments

Gov. Densantis also appointed four residents of Highlands County to the panel.

—Lana Puckorius, of Avon Park, is a certified financial planner and the retired presi-



Atchley

dent of Puckorius and Associates. She served on the South Florida State College District Board of Trustees since 2011 and is also a Past President of the South Florida State College Foundation.

—Patrick Wright, of Avon Park, is the President of V&W Farms Inc. He is a former Avon Park City Councilman and has been involved with the National Milk Producers Federation, Avon Park Breakfast Rotary and the Dairy Farmers of America. Wright earned his bachelor's degree with honors in finance, his master of business administra-

tion and his juris doctor from the University of Florida.

—Kris Rider, of Lake Placid, is the retired bookkeeper at the law offices of Michael A. Rider. She is a 50-year resident of Highlands County and has volunteered her time with the Lake Placid High School Advisory Board, Take Stock in Children, Memorial United Methodist Church and the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. Rider is a graduate of South Florida State College.

—Tamela "Tami" Cullens, of Sebring, has worked for her family business, Saxon Groves and has worked for Glisson Animal Supply, Two F Brands, and the Sebring International Raceway. She is a past chair of the South Florida State College District Board of Trustees and has been involved with the Association of Florida Colleges, Florida College System Foundation, South Florida State College Foundation and Healthy Kids of Florida. Cullens earned her bachelor's degree in retail management from Webber International University.

The appointments are subject to confirmation by the Florida Senate.

SFSC Health Sciences Students Receive Scholarships



SFSC Nursing students from the Associate in Science In Nursing and Practical Nursing programs.



By DEBORAH BELL LATTER

Special To The Herald-Advocate

During the December meeting of South Florida State College's (SFSC) District Board of Trustees, 24 students studying for careers in the health sciences at SFSC received \$24,324 in scholarships.

Florida Blue Nursing and Allied Health Scholarships were awarded to SFSC students in nursing, dental education, and radiography programs. The students may use the scholarships for tuition, textbooks, lab fees, and child-care.

Students receiving the scholarships are

studying within three health science disciplines:

NURSING: Angelica Alicea of Highlands County, Teresa Baker of Highlands County, Elisar Cleto of Hardee County, Caitlin Cwalinski of Highlands County, Vanessa Davidson of Highlands County, Ray Nino Espidol of Highlands County, Abigail Fraga of Highlands County, Breanna Lee of Highlands County, Eduardo Magana of Highlands County, Erin McGlinchey of Highlands County, Jessica Morris of Hardee County, Ivone Nava of Highlands County, Stephanie Quezada of DeSoto County, and Diana Tello of Highlands County;

DENTAL EDUCATION: Deborah Figuero



SFSC Dental Education students from the Dental Hygiene and Dental Assisting programs. COURTESY PHOTOS



SFSC Radiography students.

of Hardee County, Sebrina Gillilan of Highlands County, Jasmine Gutierrez-Montes of Hardee County, Noel Henry of Polk County, and Jaylin Maynard of DeSoto County; and

RADIOLOGY: Abigail Doucet of Highlands County, Rebecca Nadaskay of Hardee County, Niki Rast of Hardee County, and Brittanie West of Highlands County.

The scholarships are the result of a partnership between the Florida College System (FCS) Foundation and Florida Blue.

The Florida Blue Nursing and Allied Health Scholarship was created to sustain a source of funding for student scholarships at Florida colleges to meet the growing need for skilled nurses and allied health professionals who serve the state's diverse population.

The SFSC Foundation provided a 50 percent match of the original award from the FCS Foundation and Florida Blue, as the funds must be matched dollar for dollar by private donors at the local level.

"Because of Florida Blue's commitment to education, SFSC students are provided with the

of study. The scholarships also allow the students to focus time and energy on their coursework, as many of these programs require intensive study and clinical commitments," said Jamie Bateman, SFSC's executive director of institutional advancement. "These students will soon begin their careers in nursing, dental care, and radiography—all of which play a critical role in keeping our community safe and healthy."

The FCS Foundation, based in Tallahassee, is a nonprofit organization that solicits gifts and donations from corporations and individuals for distribution to Florida's 28 community and state colleges.

SFSC has received scholarships for health sciences students since 2006. Florida Blue, previously known as Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida, provides individual and group health insurance to millions of Floridians.

Deborah Bell Latter is the coordinator of internal communications at South Florida State College and can be reached at 863-784-7251

Forty and Eight Awards Scholarships To SFSC Nursing Students

By **DEBORAH BELL LATTER**

Special To The Herald-Advocate

The Forty and Eight Voiture 899 recently presented scholarships for the fall academic term and commemorative nurses' training Forty and Eight emblem lapel pins to four South Florida State College (SFSC) nursing students.

Amy Hines, a student who is working toward her Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), received a \$375 scholarship.

Whitney Wood, a student working toward her BSN, received a \$250 scholarship.

Giselle Mendez, who is working toward her Associate in Science in Nursing (ADN), received a \$500 scholarship.

Shanice Lewis, a student working toward her Practical Nursing (PN) career certificate, received a \$500 scholarship.

The scholarship money may be used to help offset the cost of tuition, books, or any other needs associated with their studies.

The Forty and Eight scholarship was established through the SFSC Foundation. Criteria for the scholarship are that the student must be enrolled in one of SFSC's nursing programs and must be enrolled at least half time in their re-

spective program.

"It's important to support nursing students because nursing is vital to keeping a community healthy," said Scottie-Ann Murphy, past Chef de Gare of the Voiture 899. "Anyone in the medical field is needed, especially during this pandemic. These people work endlessly."

The Forty and Eight is a national organization of war veterans and a longtime sponsor of nurses' training. As of July 2020, the Forty and Eight across the United States has expended over \$34,400,000 toward scholarships and assisted 52,186 nurses in obtaining their nursing degrees.

SFSC offers an online BSN program, a two-year ADN program, an 11-month PN career certificate program, and a 13-month Transition Nursing (Licensed Practical Nursing to Registered Nurse) program.

For information, visit southflorida.edu.

Photo not available for Amy Hines. 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.



Mendez



Wood



Lewis

sfsc foundation
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Coast Guard Veteran Turned Mango Farmer Graduates SFSC

By **DEBORAH BELL LATTER**

Special To The Herald-Advocate

J.C. Scott was one of 162 graduates crossing the stage during South Florida State College's (SFSC) Commencement ceremony on Thursday, Dec. 17. He received an Associate in Arts, an Associate in Science in Landscape and Horticulture Technology, a College Credit Certificate in Landscape and Horticulture Technician, and a College Credit Certificate in Landscape and Horticulture Professional.

An Avon Park native, Scott is a farmer and recently started a small, local business. But his interest in law enforcement took him across the country, only to bring him back to his hometown.

Scott graduated from Avon Park High School in 2005 and received his diploma while in boot camp with the U.S. Coast Guard.

"I wanted to go into law enforcement and into the military," he said. "But I was torn as to which career to pursue. I decided to join the Coast Guard because it's the only military service with law enforcement authority. And I grew up on the water and fished all the time."

Immediately out of boot camp, Scott was assigned to a station in Homer, a town with a population of 6,000 in south-central Alaska, where he served as a Boatswain's Mate (BM).

"I was on a 225-foot seagoing buoy tender," he said. "Our main job was to service aids to navigation—all the red and green buoys that indicate where it's safe to navigate. We sailed from one end of Alaska to the other and went out to the Aleutian Islands. From there, you could see Russia in the distance. We would pull into little towns that had a population of 30 or 40 and we would double the population just by showing up."

Scott was then assigned to a small boat search and rescue station in Destin, Fla., where he served for four years. During the time Scott served in Destin, his station conducted 350 search and rescue cases.

"I was on about one third of those," he said. "We worked on everything from plane crashes to flare sightings to lightning strikes to boat collisions. We also did a lot of recreational boardings—such as checking for life jackets and fire extinguishers."

They also checked charter boats to make sure they had proper firefighting capabilities and weren't dumping sewage or gray water. And they made sure that tug boats and barges had appropriate licenses.

The Coast Guard soon offered a rating specific to law enforcement called the Maritime Enforcement Specialist (MES). It was right up Scott's alley, so he applied.

"The BM does law enforcement but it's a collateral duty—an added duty. For a Maritime Enforcement Specialist, law enforcement and all aspects of it are your whole career."

When Scott was accepted as an MES, he was transferred to Chesapeake, Va. to the Maritime Security Response Team (MSRT), where he began a six-year billet.

"The MSRT specializes as a CBRNE unit," he said. "It's a chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high yield explosives unit. An example is if intelligence was obtained that a container ship coming in had a dirty bomb or a biological weapon on it and the perpetrators planned to detonate it somewhere in the United States. MSRT is specially trained to handle that situation, take care of the terrorists, and secure the weapon."

"So, we trained in full chemical gear — a rubber suit with a gas mask. You're completely sealed in this suit so you can operate in that environment. Then you have your kit on top of that—ceramic-plated body armor, all your weapons, all your breaching equipment, and all your testing equipment to see what kind of environment you're in. You're wearing 60 to 80 lbs. of gear, and it's like wearing a sauna suit with a gas mask."

Scott trained for two years with the MSRT

when disaster happened. While heading across the top of an obstacle course, he slipped and fell, landing upside down. He hit his head and broke his back. Without knowing that he had damaged his back, he completed the obstacle course. Sometime later, he was at the firing range, lifted his rifle, and his right arm wouldn't respond. A medical exam determined that cysts had developed in the middle of his spinal cord, causing him to lose function in his right arm.

So instead of continuing training in Chesapeake, Scott was sent to a small boat station in Ketchikan, Alaska, where he was placed in charge of the armory and headed the law enforcement training program.

"I loved that unit," he said. "I had a great command and I worked hard for them and they worked hard to make sure I got all the treatment I needed."

Eventually, he took a medical retirement after 11 years in the Coast Guard and returned home to Highlands County.

When Scott first returned home, he walked with a cane and his right side was shutting down because of the cyst. But he and wife, Stephanie, got a small vegetable farm up and running. But Hurricane Irma descended, wiping out the farm. When it was re-established, the Scotts lost bushels of produce due to theft.

But Scott's determination prevailed.

"I knew I wanted to do something in agriculture," he said. While at MSRT, gardening became Scott's stress relief. He and Stephanie raised chickens and meat rabbits and had grown a large vegetable garden that supplied much of their family food while in Chesapeake, Va.

"MSRT was stressful," he said. "You jumped out of helicopters and shot guns all day and wore heavy kit while doing it. I needed good stress relief, and gardening provided the nice quiet time that I needed."

With the assistance of the GI Bill, Scott applied to SFSC to study agriculture. It was also the point at which he found a doctor who helped restore the mobility in his legs and arms.

In 2019, Scott and his wife purchased a house on 10 acres that's almost a stone's throw from his family home. "It's about a quarter of a mile from where I grew up," he said. "I joined the Coast Guard, went to Alaska and Virginia, and just ended up right back less than a mile from there."

Although Scott's health concerns were progressing in a positive direction, he still had trouble bending over to harvest vegetables and decided to focus on fruit trees.

"A friend of mine gave me some mangoes that he grows at his house," he said. "I didn't even like mangoes before, because the ones you get at the grocery store don't taste very good. But the mangoes from my friend were another story and that got me headed down the mango road."

While researching mango cultivation, he was discouraged from growing mangoes in Highlands County.

"The University of Florida told me that you can't grow mangoes here," he said. "But if you drive through Avon Park, I don't think I can count as high as the number of mango trees that grow here. My friend's mango tree is over 70 years old, so it survived all the freezes we've had. Although mango trees are vulnerable to cold, you have to take precautions but it's do-able. I've taken a lot of citrus courses at the College. Because the nutritional requirements for mangos are so similar to citrus, that information has been helpful."

Currently, Scott has an acre grove on which he's testing up to 27 varieties of mangoes. In the meantime, he and Stephanie have started a coffee business—not growing coffee but selling it.

"My wife wanted a coffee business and I want to be a farmer. A mango grove takes a

few years to get going and it costs money to get everything established. You have to wait, so we started the coffee business to fund the farm to get it on its feet. My end of it is that I get to sell produce from it on the side. I started selling vegetables because it's locally grown, organic produce. Many local produce stands get their vegetables from Plant City and much of that produce comes from overseas."

Scott explained that mangoes are a higher value crop and although 500 varieties of mango exist, only two varieties are sold in the United States. Scott wants to expand the market and the flavor palate.

"I never knew that there were mangoes that tasted like orange sherbet or piña colada or pineapple, or coconut."

"When we decided to start the coffee business, we wanted to stand out," Scott said. "I grew up in agriculture—that's what I wanted to do. So we decided we would take a horse trailer and convert it into a coffee trailer that had that branding and look." Scott's coffee business was named partly for his grandfather's cattle ranch brand: Rocking JS. And as luck would have it, all five of his children's names, including his foster daughter, begin with the letter "J."

"We serve coffee- and espresso-based drinks," he said. "All of our coffee drinks that aren't espresso are cold brewed." The coffee business opened in the middle of Tropical Storm Eta and the Scotts' coffee trailer is often seen during festivals and other such local events.

After earning two degrees and two College Credit Certificates in agriculture from SFSC, Scott would like to continue his education toward a bachelor's degree in agriculture.

"I know that SFSC partners with Warner University in Lake Wales, to accept the agriculture degree," he said. "I haven't looked into it too much at the moment because I'm looking forward to the break from college next semester."

Scott has educational advice for prospective students.

"Just going blindly and wanting a bachelor's degree in a certain field that they don't know much about can cause people problems," he said. "The Career Development Center at SFSC is really good about helping people learn about all aspects of a potential job and the degree they would need for that particular job. People should spend time in the Career Development Center before they pick their major."

Rob Hampton, director of the SFSC Career Development Center and the College's Veterans Affairs certifying officer, said that he has learned a lot from working with Scott.

"J.C. and I met when I was working in SFSC's Advising and Counseling Center. I was



COURTESY PHOTO

J.C. Scott with son, Jacob. Scott, a veteran of the U.S. Coast Guard, has been trying his hand at raising mangos as he worked toward completing his college degree at South Florida State College.

advising him for our A.S. in Landscape and Horticulture Technology program and we started talking about agriculture," Hampton said. "We figured out quickly that we, as two old veterans, had a passion for agriculture. And there have been many times when I reached out for some farming advice. Thanks to J.C., my green thumb has gotten a lot greener."

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