

SFSC Student Awarded Selby Scholarship

By **DEBORAH BELL LATTER**

Special To The Herald-Advocate

Avigail Avila, a recent graduate of South Florida State College (SFSC), was awarded a scholarship through the William G. and Marie Selby Foundation.

For more than six decades, the Foundation has supported education through grants and scholarship programs. The Selby Scholarship is available to residents of DeSoto, Sarasota, Manatee, and Charlotte counties and is awarded to graduating high school seniors and graduating associate degree students from any state college in those four counties. All applicants must be planning to pursue a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university on a full-time basis.

Avila graduated from DeSoto County High School on Friday, June 11 and graduated from SFSC with an Associate in Arts on Tuesday, May 11. While in high school, Avila's plate was full. She participated in the dual enrollment program at SFSC, she was a Take Stock in Children scholar, she worked at DeSoto Memorial Hospital screening visitors for COVID-19 and providing directions to various departments, she drove her sister to work in Port Charlotte, and she cared for her baby sister while her mother was at work.

Avila plans to continue her education at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) in Fort Myers to study for a bachelor's degree in Nursing.

"The Selby Scholarship is going to assist me

by providing financial aid that I truly need to cover my FGCU expenses," Avila said. "I do not come from a wealthy family, and anything that I receive will help. Not only will it help me reach my goals, but I will be able to change the world as well as make it a better place for future generations and give back to the community."

Asena Mott, SFSC DeSoto Campus director and Avila's Take Stock in Children mentor, nominated her for the Selby scholarship.

"Given her quick thinking and her intelligence, Avigail has the talent to be an incredible nurse, which has been her plan since I've known her for the past few years," Mott said. "I know she could make life-saving decisions in a high-pressure environment, and I know her compassion for others takes precedence in decisions. She has a natural propensity to lead and to learn."

According to the William G. & Marie Selby Foundation, the Selbys owned an oil company in West Virginia and came to live in Sarasota in the 1920s. In his oil business, William encountered young people with untapped potential who were handicapped by lack of technical education. Prior to his death in 1956, William set up a charitable trust. The Selbys had no children of their own and wanted to use their money to help the youth of future generations.

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Avigail Avila (left), recipient of the Selby scholarship, with Asena Mott, SFSC DeSoto Campus director and Avila's Take Stock in Children mentor.

COURTESY PHOTO

SFSC awards Aleah Walker

**Special to the
Highlands News-Sun**
PROVIDED BY SFSC

AVON PARK — Lake Placid resident Aleah Walker received the South Florida State College (SFSC) Performing Arts and Culture Award from Cindy Garren, director of cultural programs. Walker, who is an Associate in Arts student, recently received the Max Gooding Best in Show Award for her graphic artwork titled "Metamorphosis."

"The Performing Arts and Culture Project is a voluntary program designed to promote a student's awareness, experience, and a deeper appreciation of the diverse cultural landscape of our



COURTESY/SFSC

From left: Aleah Walker receives the SFSC Performing Arts and Culture Award from Director of Cultural Programs Cindy Garren.

community," Garren said. Students are encouraged to visit three arts or cultural activities or places and then write a reflection paper on the significance

and emotional impact of those arts activities.

Walker received a \$300 stipend and will use her award toward her tuition. She plans to graduate in

spring 2022 from SFSC with an Associate in Arts degree and continue her education with a Bachelor of Arts degree in graphic design. SFSC Art faculty member Karla Respress encouraged her students to participate in the project.

"It was easy to do and it was a good experience to visit Bok Tower Gardens, the Van Gogh exhibit, and the SFSC Student Art Exhibit. This project motivated me to attend more cultural events and helped me understand that artists are relating the human experience through their art," Walker said.

For more information on performing arts at SFSC, visit SFSCArts.org

SFSC Alumnus Derrick Roper Discovers A Passion For Teaching



Derrick Roper (right) performs as Wendal in Cheryl L. West's play, "Before It Hits Home," as his graduate school thesis performance at SCAD.

COURTESY PHOTOS

By DEBORAH BELL LATTER

Special To The Herald-Advocate

As young people, we all dream about how our lives will unfold. We may dream of a career that fulfills our ambitions. Sometimes, when our dreams become reality, they take a turn in a direction we would never have expected. A passion may become something new and equally fulfilling. And so it was for Derrick Roper, a South Florida State College (SFSC) alumnus who graduated from the College in December 2006 with an Associate in Arts.

Roper loved to perform. When he was a student at Avon Park High School, he tried out for cheerleading in his sophomore year and made the junior varsity team. His cheerleading coach suggested he take classes at a dance studio in Avon Park, so he signed up. Although he had never taken dance classes before, his instructor, Amy Sims, was impressed with his abilities. Once he graduated from high school, Sims asked him to teach dance at the studio.

"I was teaching hip hop dance," Roper said. "That was my skill. I had never been trained in any other genres of dance. Miss Amy pushed me into to doing Jazz and things like that. Kids and parents had seen me dancing at the studio for the previous three years, so they all knew me. So, when I started teaching, all of the younger kids wanted to sign up. I had about 25 first graders in my first class. It was a lot of fun. I learned a lot from Miss Amy about how to teach. Under her leadership, I learned how to become a choreographer and dance teacher. And I fell in love with it."

But Roper's performance skills branched into acting. While he was a student at SFSC, he was cast as one of the leads in a musical produced by Larry Moore called "Yuletide Treasure" at the Restoration Center in Sebring. Moore was a Sebring resident who owned a production company. "Once I did musical theater, I really fell in love with the life," Roper said. "I knew that this is what I really wanted to go to college for."

Roper continued his education at Florida A&M University (FAMU), majored in theater performance, and graduated in the summer of 2009. At FAMU, some of the productions he performed in were August Wilson's play, "Jitney," and a children's production of "The Emperor's New Clothes." At the Boys and Girls Club in Tallahassee he taught hip hop dance. He also performed at Tallahassee Little Theater as part of the dance ensemble in "Chicago" and played Papa Ge in Lynn Ahrens' one-act musical, "Once on This Island."

"While at FAMU, one of the biggest productions I was in was called FAMU Connection," Roper said. "It's the university's recruitment tool. During football season, college fairs are held at high schools. Wherever the football team is playing, they hold a college fair. The FAMU Connection travels with the team and goes to the high schools. It's a 25-minute show—live singing and dancing. That was one of the biggest things that I enjoyed about FAMU."

During his last semester at FAMU, Roper's professor said, "You should go to Disney in Orlando and audition. So, once you graduate, they've already seen your face and you can get yourself out there and maybe have a future opportunity."

Roper drove to Orlando and auditioned for "High School Musical II, the Live Show."

"I was just going in for an audition for the experience and to see how I do in that environment," he said. "I auditioned and got a call back. During the call back, they were making cuts left and right. It went from 50 of us down to four. I was one of the four, so I was like, 'This is real.' Then they asked questions such as, 'Are you willing to relocate if you're offered a contract?'"

Disney called back and offered Roper a full-time contract for a principal role.

"But I was still in school," he said. "I didn't think my professors would want me to take a semester off. I was about to graduate."

Roper approached his professor and told him about the contract offer. His professor said, "It's your last semester, so you can use your experience to write a thesis paper."

Roper wrote his thesis on performing in an equity show. By working in the Disney production, he received his Equity card for the union, Actors' Equity Association.

"You need your Equity card when you go to New York and audition for Equity-only productions," Roper said. "I wrote my thesis on my nine-month contract with Disney and six outdoor shows a day in the blazing heat, from January through September. It sounds grueling, but it truly was a learning experience. It was so much fun."

Eventually, a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) was in Roper's future and he was accepted into the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD). He was awarded his MFA from SCAD in 2012. "At SCAD, I had a lead role in a musical called, 'Zombie Prom,' and we performed the musical, 'Hair.' I was part of the ensemble, and my character's name was Hud."

"After SCAD, I wanted to move to New York," Roper said. "When I was in high school, when I was at FAMU, even at SCAD, roles were coming to me left and right. I thought that when I got to New York, I would audition for Equity shows. After I moved to New York, I started auditioning. I mean audition, audition, audition. And you hear a million 'No's.' When you're hearing, 'No, no, no,' it makes you rethink your talent. I would get a call back but not make it any further. But, I still had to work. So, I applied for a job teaching hip hop dance at Harlem Children's Zone in New York. I could still audition for theater roles because I was teaching after school hours for them. But the more I taught, the more I grew professionally in my job. Then, I auditioned less. At my job, I was promoted from dance instructor to the middle school program coordinator at the Harlem Children's Zone.

"I had staff working under me. I was in leadership. From there, I got another promotion to assistant director for middle school and high school. By this time, I had stopped auditioning altogether. I had been teaching kids for so long and liked teaching kids that it became second nature."

Eventually, Roper was offered a teaching position with Achievement First, a charter school in New York. He applied and interviewed just before the pandemic hit. "I had never taught in a classroom. But that's what I'm doing currently. It's my first year as a full-time theater teacher."

During the pandemic, Roper's classes were taught by remote.

"There are a lot of theater resources online and books to teach theater online," he said. "And a lot of at-home exercises that you can do. The students love to do partner scenes, so I found different scripts for them. I taught them about characterization, vocal expression, and how to use different movements. Because they were limited in in-person interaction, we had to rely on our voices. We made sure we were connecting our voices to our characters and paying attention to enunciation. We've done things like that in the virtual space."

"I love that I'm teaching the arts and that I'm teaching theater," Roper said. "The school is predominately African American, so I'm teaching little boys that look like me. When I was in elementary and middle school and high school, I didn't have a ME as a teacher. And I didn't have anyone to expose me to theater at a young age. Although I loved to perform, I didn't know what it was."

Roper said that the most satisfying thing about his career has been his transition to teaching the arts.

"There's no better thing for me than to be on the stage," he said. "But to teach it and give feedback to little ones, I'm certain that I'm giving them knowledge and confidence that they'll be able to use for the rest of their lives. Just to know that they have to deal with the injustice in the world with being a little black or brown kid -- to make sure that they have support, that they have someone to go to, that Mr. Roper is always there. If I see something in them, I'm going to try to bring that passion out of them. I love working with kids and watching them blossom and help them rise to their full potential."

Roper followed his dreams and found a new passion. As someone who's been there, he has a message for young people:

"Find your passion and make sure that it's something that you love to do. No matter the obstacle or no matter what anyone says, go after that passion and do it and live life to the fullest with no regrets. No matter where you're from, no matter how small the town is, you can dream big and see what you need to do to follow your dream. Don't let where you're from or your surroundings stop you."

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.



In his first year teaching at Achievement First in New York City, Derrick Roper provided performance instruction exclusively on Zoom.

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SFSC Foundation receives 2 dorm build proposals

By **MARC VALERO**
STAFF WRITER

AVON PARK —The South Florida State College Foundation received two proposals to construct a dormitory on the Highlands Campus in Avon Park

Marmer Construction, Inc. and Short Pants Development, LLC, both of Sebring, submitted the proposals.

“The SFSC Foundation

is excited to receive proposals to construct dormitory facilities on the Highlands Campus,” said Jamie Bateman, executive director of institutional advancement at South Florida State College.

“The two proposals will be opened publicly at a Ranking Committee Meeting on Tuesday, July 13. The committee members will then proceed to review the proposals and evaluate each one based

on the stated criteria. A recommendation will then be made to the Foundation Board on July 20 for final approval.”

The proposed location for the construction of a residency/dormitory for students is on College Drive just east of the Criminal Justice Academy building. Student capacity could range from 90 to 110.

The college/Foundation earlier received two

unsolicited proposals, from both Marmer Construction and Short Pants Development, to build new dorm facilities, but they had to resubmit for this request.

The Foundation did not prepare a request for proposal, but prepared an informational document indicating it had previously received two unsolicited proposals and

DORM | 5A



MARC VALERO/STAFF

A committee will rank two proposals, the SFSC Foundation received, to build a dormitory just east of the Criminal Justice Academy building on the Highlands Campus in Avon Park.

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asked if any other developers would like the opportunity to propose their ideas or plans for the project.

A committee was formed to review the dormitory proposals comprised of four members of the Foundation board

and three members representing the District Board of Trustees.

The Foundation members include: John Shoop, Bill Jarrett, Tres Stephenson and Michael Kelly. On the Trustees side, representatives are SFSC President Tom Leitzel, SFSC Vice President of Administrative Services Peter Elliott and Board Member Terry Atchley.

SFSC Performing Arts Creates Fundraising Event for Local Nonprofits



COURTESY PHOTO

Mark Nizer in performance. His 4D shows incorporates special glasses that allow for amazing light and technology effects.

By DEBORAH BELL LATTER

Special To The Herald-Advocate

South Florida State College (SFSC) Performing Arts will present Mark Nizer: The Only 4D Show in the World to benefit local nonprofits on Sunday, Nov. 14 at 3 p.m. in the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts in Avon Park. This performance is featured as part of "Play Your Part!"

Sponsored by Bill and Lisa Jarrett, Play Your Part! was created to help Highlands, Hardee, and DeSoto County nonprofits and parent teacher organizations (PTOs) raise necessary funds.

"SFSC Performing Arts is giving back to our community," said Cindy Garren, director of cultural programs at SFSC. "In 2019, local groups raised \$8,690 and a few of the nonprofits raised nearly \$2,000. It's a perfect, fun, family event for PTOs and local nonprofits and our goal is to raise \$10,000 this year."

Only 501(c) (3) nonprofit, charitable organizations and PTOs can apply to participate in Play Your Part! The organization must provide services within Highlands, Hardee, or DeSoto counties. Special consideration will be given to organizations benefiting youth, education, the arts, or wellness. Applications are available online at sfscarts.org/education/pyp or request an application by emailing culturalperformances@southflorida.edu. Applications must be received by Friday, Aug. 20 and include a certificate of nonprofit status.

Selected nonprofits receive 25 – 100 tickets for the performance. The nonprofit will sell tickets for \$10 each and keep 100% of their ticket revenue. Additional tickets can be re-

quested by the nonprofit and SFSC will provide promotional materials. All unsold tickets must be returned to SFSC Performing Arts prior to the performance.

"A dinner meeting will be held on Thursday, Aug. 26 at 5:30 p.m.," explained Garren. "Two representatives from the nonprofit must attend for an orientation and receive their tickets."

Entertainer Mark Nizer has changed the way people view the world making the impossible possible and the improbable probable. Since winning the International Juggling Championships, Mark has taken his one-man show to thousands of venues around the world, including The Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Walt Disney World, and thousands of performing arts centers. He has opened for Jerry Seinfeld, Bob Hope, George Burns, John Byner, Gladys Knight, The Temptations, Johnny Mathis, Ray Charles, and Barry Manilow Entertainment Magazine states.

"Without a doubt, the hottest juggler on the entertainment market; Mark Nizer is simply incredible," Garren said.

His 4D shows incorporates special glasses that allow for amazing light and technology effects. Audience members' cellphones become part of the show as Nizer uses them to light up the theatre. It is perfect entertainment for all ages with original comedy, music, technology, and world-class juggling.

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The cellphones of audience members become part of the show as Nizer uses them to light up the theatre. It is perfect entertainment for all ages with original comedy, music, technology, and world-class juggling.

SFSC Dental Assisting Graduates Honored At Pinning Ceremony



Dental Assisting Class 2021: (back, from l) Elizabeth Gomez, Jannete Godinez, Wendy Yvette Rivera, Briana Molina, Monica Medrano, Yasmine Martinez, and Deborah Figueroa; and (front, from l) Jasmine Gutierrez-Montes, Laynee Galvan, Dacie Luna-Moreno, Joanna Perez Granados, and Blanca Serapio Vivanco.

By DEBORAH BELL LATTER

Special To The Herald-Advocate

South Florida State College (SFSC) honored 12 graduates of its Dental Assisting Program in a pinning ceremony in the Alan J. Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts at SFSC on Thursday, July 15. Dental Assisting graduates receiving their pins were: Deborah Figueroa, Dacie Luna-Moreno, Laynee Galvan, Briana Molina, Monica Medrano, Jannete Godinez, Yasmine Martinez, Joanna Perez Granados, Blanca Serapio Vivanco, Wendy Yvette Rivera, Elizabeth Gomez, and Jasmine Gutierrez-Montes.

To open the ceremony, Dr. Michele Heston, dean of health sciences, paid special tribute to Bob Sconyers, who retires from SFSC in August after serving 15 years as dental assisting professor.

"Mr. Sconyers told me once that he doesn't like pinning ceremonies and that they should never happen," she said. "During a ceremony, I learned the reason behind his perplexing comment. He was keynote speaker and shared

his passion for his profession, his students, and teaching them to become the most compassionate, competent dental assistants that they could possibly be. He said he hated pinning night because his students would leave his classroom. He treasured that time with students so much that the goodbyes were heart-breaking."

Dr. Heston shared several of the graduates' warm and complimentary comments about Sconyers.

Class president Deborah Figueroa introduced Sconyers as the evening's keynote speaker. As a special thanks to him on behalf of her class, she presented him with a plaque. "As a gift for your past and to remember us in your future," Figueroa said.

"This is my last official function," Sconyers said. "The whole 15 years, I've enjoyed. The last year has been so special, and it's all because of these young women."

Addressing the graduates, he said, "I want to talk a little bit about the dental assisting profession. Dental assistants make dentistry faster, safer, and cheaper. They make it

faster by being the dentist's right hand or right several hands, so that they can do their job quicker. Dental assistants make dentistry safer by keeping the dental clinic clean and keeping the patient comfortable. If the dentists had to do dentistry by themselves, we couldn't afford it. But with dental assistants, dentists are able to see many more patients and are able to keep the cost down."

"This is the best class I've ever taught," Sconyers continued. "Every time I asked them to do something, they made it their mission to get it done quickly and correctly. They were the best ever at practicing their skills over and over until they could get 100% on every process. And they have made me a better teacher. You leave as highly trained dental assistants. Now your job is to be the best dental assistant ever. But don't stop there. Continue to challenge yourselves. Keep learning. Whatever you do, wherever you want to go, you have to have a plan to get there. Make life happen on your terms. You need a plan for your education. Do you want to be a den-

tal hygienist? Do you want to be a dentist? Do you want a bachelor's degree? You can do it.

"The small things you do will have a great impact on others," he said. "You can donate blood, you can volunteer wherever you like. Community service is its own reward. Always be nice. Being nice is a choice. I want to thank my students. You made this the best and most enjoyable year."

After completing the 11-month Career Certificate program in Dental Assisting, graduates can work as certified dental assistants by passing the Dental Assisting National Board Examination (DANB) and qualifying for the Expanded Functions Dental Assisting Certification as well as Orthodontic Assistant Certification.

For information on SFSC's Dental Education programs, call 863-784-7027 or email healthsciences@southflorida.edu.



COURTESY PH

Class President Deborah Figueroa presents Dental Assisting Professor Bob Sconyers with a plaque of recognition.