

SFSC partners with Florida Department of Education for new college initiative

Special to Highlands News-Sun

AVON PARK — South Florida State College (SFSC) joins the Florida Department of Education for a new college enrollment initiative to provide opportunities for students who graduated high school in 2020 and 2021 to enroll in the Florida College System (FCS). "Now, Not Tomorrow" helps educate families about the financial incentives that are available for students to pursue higher education.

The SFSC Foundation recently received a grant of \$6,030 from the Helios Education Foundation that will be matched, bringing the funds to \$12,060. Administered by the Florida Student Success Center, the grant provides incentive for students to enroll in associate degree programs in fall 2021 that prepare

them to transfer to a four-year institution or entry into employment.

"Many of our local residents have been negatively impacted due to the public health crisis caused by COVID-19," said Jamie Bateman, executive director, SFSC institutional advancement, who oversees the SFSC Foundation. "SFSC has identified a need with our local students whose lives were disrupted when either they or their family members lost jobs due to the crisis. Families were negatively impacted financially. Those effects are felt to this day."

Each recipient will be awarded between \$500-\$1,000 for fall scholarships. To apply for a scholarship, students must be first time in college, enrolled at SFSC at minimum on a part-time basis, and have graduated from high school

in 2020 or 2021. They must submit a standard financial aid application to the SFSC Financial Aid Office along with the scholarship application. Preference will be given to students who live in Highlands, DeSoto or Hardee County. Students are encouraged to visit southflorida.awardspring.com to complete an application and apply for and find over 100 scholarships available to assist them.

Commenting on Helios' generosity, Florida Commissioner of Education Richard Corcoran said, "This generous grant, funded by Helios Education Foundation, will open the door to higher education to students who may think that their dream is out of reach or only for those more financially fortunate – students like me when I was college

age. My attendance at my local colleges is truly what set me on the path to success."

At South Florida State College, students can enroll in an in-demand and high-quality associate degree program, such as nursing, dental hygiene, network systems technology, business administration, and engineering technology.

In assessing the potential impact of the scholarship, FCS Chancellor Kathy Hebda said, "This scholarship helps students start right now in AA and AS degree-seeking pathways that are uniquely available in our Florida College System. Florida's 2+2 system of matriculation from a state college to a state university is still the envy of the nation. We are excited to partner with Helios Education Foundation to help high school seniors



COURTESY/SFSC

From left: Tina Statson, of Helios, presents a check to Jamie Bateman of South Florida State College.

realize that their path to success is close to home. I encourage our seniors and graduates from the Class of 2020 who have

not yet started college to contact their local college's financial aid office and take that first step today."

AdventHealth, SFSC offer unique apprentice program

By **KIM MOODY**
STAFF WRITER

SEBRING — AdventHealth Sebring and South Florida State College have partnered to create a unique and valuable education opportunity through an apprentice program. The Advanced Patient Care Tech Apprenticeship Program is ideal for those interested in a nursing

profession. The program began in January and has about nine apprentices enrolled.

Besides getting a foot in the door to nursing and a good education, a very attractive aspect to the program is a paid apprenticeship and health insurance benefits.

Maria "Lisa" Dela Cruz, the clinical education manager for AdventHealth, said South

Florida State College got a grant for the program and offered the partnership to AdventHealth Sebring. The grant came through Gov. DeSantis' Department of Education.

The students go to the college for their related technical instruction (RTI) and to the hospital for the on-the-job-training (OJT).

"Before they start, they have to go to the college

and learn some basic healthcare and then they come to us and have their on-the-job-training," Dela Cruz said.

She explained that the program has three clinical ladders. The ladders incorporate classroom and online teaching as well as mentoring in various settings. Hourly pay rates vary per ladder starting at

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COURTESY/
ADVENTHEALTH

Maria "Lisa" Dela Cruz is the clinical education manager for the Advanced Patient Care Tech Apprenticeship Program at AdventHealth Sebring, in partnership with South Florida State College.

PROGRAM

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\$12.64 at Clinical Ladder 1 to \$14.64 in Clinical Ladder 3.

"In Clinical Ladder 1, the apprentice gets to

learn how to be a nursing assistant and they have basic health care," Dela Cruz said.

Clinical Ladder 2 focuses on phlebotomy skills while Ladder 3 focuses on becoming a home health aide and an EKG

technician. The program requires 300 RTI hours and 3,000 OJT hours and takes about 18 months to complete.

"The apprentice will get a certification from the governor saying that this person has graduated the Advanced Patient Care Tech Apprenticeship Program, Dela Cruz said. "Wherever he or she goes, it is acknowledged in the whole of the United States."

AdventHealth will pay for the certifications for CNA (certified nurse assistant) and phlebotomy at the end of the program, according to Dela Cruz. The apprentices will earn eight credit units toward a nursing degree.

Dela Cruz said the program is important in the community because there is always a need for nurses as many retire or move. A focus on the retention of educated and passionate health care providers in the area is key.

The requirements for applicants are: 17 years of age or older and have a high school diploma/GED and speak fluent English. For information on signing up, call 863-386-6464.

Jeremiah Sawyer, 19, is an apprentice who is very happy to be a part of the apprenticeship program. He has been in the program for three and a half months.

"I had already started my pre-requisites for the nursing program because I want to be an R.N. (registered nurse)," he said. "I actually was trying to find a job related to health care and it so happens that at my local church, I had a friend there who told me about this program. I thought it was super awesome. So, I applied and it was a long journey but I am on staff, so, it's great."

He said working with patients is the best part of the program for him. Sawyer said at first it was hard because "you can't make a mistake" but at the end of the day, it is very "rewarding."

"It really sets us up for success," Sawyer said.

That's why I really love the program."

Sawyer plans to graduate as an R.N. from SFSC and would like to work in pediatrics. His plans could include becoming nurse practitioner.

"I'm going to take one step at a time," Sawyer said. "We have such an awesome clinical education team. It's just so awesome because they are constantly pushing us and guiding us toward success. That's what I love about this program too, you have mentors all around you."

Dela Cruz said Sawyer's quick actions helped a patient who was unconscious. One weekend when Sawyer was working, he began to get vital

signs on a patient.

"For some reason I went into this patient's room to do her vitals first and I don't know why but I just went in there. She was slanted, well, she was sitting up but slanted on the side of the bed. Usually when we come in, our patients are sleeping. I didn't think she was sleeping because she was unresponsive. It was a little scary. I couldn't find anyone around for some help so, I hit that Code Blue button and everyone came in."

The patient had fainted and all was well. He said the program really gets "your feet wet."

"If you have the heart and work ethic to do it, it's awesome."



COURTESY/ADVENTHEALTH

Jeremiah Sawyer hones his skills with "Margaret," a life skills mannequin as part of the Advanced Patient Care Tech Apprenticeship Program. The program is a partnership between South Florida State College and AdventHealth Sebring.

Lohrer realizes dream of becoming an attorney

By Special to Highlands News-Sun

PROVIDED BY SOUTH FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE

AVON PARK — When South Florida State College (SFSC) alumnus Edward Lohrer graduated from high school, he wasn't sure what he wanted to do with his life. He had grown up in Lake Placid, Florida, and all he knew was that he wanted to see what life held for him beyond the borders of Highlands County. Although he didn't have a life plan in those early years, he discovered that through self-determination, he could create the life he wanted. He is now an attorney and shareholder with the law firm Becker & Poliakoff in its Fort Lauderdale, Florida office.

At age 17, Lohrer met and spoke with an Army recruiter stationed at a table in front of Publix Supermarket. The

recruiter followed up, coming to the Lohrers' home, where he introduced himself to Lohrer's parents. Lohrer's parents thought the Army would be a good experience for him, so they signed a waiver allowing him to join the Army.

"They were offering money for college at the time," Lohrer said. "It was \$30,000. My parents didn't have a lot of money, but I knew I wanted to eventually go to college."

However, Lohrer needed to complete his senior year at Lake Placid High School. The Army recruiter told him about SFSC's Adult High School program held at its Lake Placid Center. "I received an SFCC high school diploma through the program," Lohrer said. "You would work at your own pace. If you needed a credit of English, you would be given all the assignments up front. As fast as you completed



COURTESY/SFSC

Edward Lohrer as a young U.S. Army recruit.

them, you would be given the next set of assignments. Through the program, I completed my senior year of high school in three or four months. That way, I was able to join the Army a year earlier than I would have



COURTESY/SFSC

Edward Lohrer, attorney and shareholder with law firm of Becker and Poliakoff.

otherwise."

So, Lohrer went into the Army on active duty at age 17. He was stationed at Fort Knox, Kentucky and his Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) was 19K, a U.S. Army M1 Abrams Armor Crewman. During combat, they operate M1 Abrams tanks.

"The Army teaches you discipline," Lohrer said. "So, it helped me mature a little earlier than other teenagers. I had never had my own bank account or credit card, and I had to do everything by myself, such as laundry. All of a sudden, I was in a situation where I only had myself to rely on."

Lohrer's four years on active duty were somewhat uneventful in that 1993 to 1997 was a relatively quiet time around the world. When his Expiration Term of Service (ETS) came up, Lohrer was ready to explore the possibility of attending the University of Florida.

Lohrer had served in the military for four years when his ETS came up. He was ready for something new in his life. "By that time, I'd started thinking about becoming a lawyer," he said. "I knew college was the next evolution in my life. I wanted to attend a reputable

college, earn a degree, and pursue graduate studies. I wanted a career and profession."

Lohrer returned to his parents' home in Lake Placid to plan his future. "There wasn't the internet like it is today, where it's easy to look things up," Lohrer said. "The University of Florida sent me information about the application process. I had been in the military and, as a junior or senior in high school, I never learned about the college application process. So, here I was, trying to figure it out on my own."

Most colleges and universities in the United States require students to take SAT or ACT entrance tests before they are granted admission. "I hadn't taken the SAT or the ACT, which was a pretty significant barrier and I didn't, particularly, feel like taking the exams four years after high school. I was naïve about it. I thought you could just show up and say, 'I want to go to this college.'"

While doing research on applying to colleges, Lohrer's father suggested he speak with someone at SFSC for advice about how to proceed. Lohrer visited SFSC's Admissions Office, where he was told that anyone who earned an Associate in Arts degree at a Florida community college would be accepted as a transfer student to a state university and wouldn't have to take the SAT or ACT. "I said, 'Sign me up,'" Lohrer said.

LOHRER

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Lohrer graduated from SFSC with an Associate in Arts in 1998 and headed to the University of Florida where he earned his bachelor's degree with a double major in Criminology and Political Science in 2000.

However, Lohrer waited too long to take the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) and submit his application to law school. He wouldn't be eligible to enroll until the following fall semester. He was established in Gainesville and saw no reason to get a job elsewhere for one year. So, he enrolled in a master's degree program that focused on political campaigns. "Instead of writing a thesis like most graduate programs require, this was more of a practical course," he said. "You had to work on an actual political campaign. Adam Putnam had been appointed Florida Commissioner of Agriculture and his state senate seat became vacant. I moved to Melbourne, Florida for four or five months and worked on the campaign for one of the people running during the special election for Putnam's seat. As that campaign was going on, I found out that I had been accepted to law school."

But for Lohrer, the military and law school eventually and surprisingly merged. During the summer of 2000 while attending the University of Florida Levin College of Law, Lohrer had been three years removed from the Army and he was beginning to miss it. Although he didn't want to be in the Army full time, he missed the orderliness of it. College life can, sometimes, seem chaotic and he missed the Army's discipline and camaraderie. "The camaraderie you share with soldiers is much different than what you share with fraternity brothers," he said.

Lohrer had taken a summer job as a census taker. An Army recruiter lived at one of the houses Lohrer visited to gather census information. He and the Army recruiter

talked at length about the Army and Lohrer revealed that he missed it. "He told me about the U.S. Army Reserve – that you don't live on a base and you report for one weekend a month somewhere locally. You can be in the Army and, yet, have a career and go to college. So, I signed up for the Army Reserve and served with a local unit in Gainesville."

But in 2001, 9/11 happened. "Until then, the world had been a pretty quiet place and no one in the Army Reserve went anywhere," he said. "I was in my third semester of law school and my Reserve unit was activated to go to Iraq. No one at the law school had any experience with people leaving to go off to war. I was the first person at the law school that this happened to. I had three days to put my world in order before I left." Lohrer was sent with his unit to train and mobilize for deployment at Fort Stewart, Georgia in February 2003 and his unit deployed to Iraq in March 2003.

After 14 months in Iraq, Lohrer returned to law school at the University of Florida. Because he had been in Iraq, Lohrer missed out on the traditional process of participating in on-campus interviews, placing him at a disadvantage for gaining the prestigious and most sought-after summer clerkships and internships. However, he was hired as a summer associate with a two-attorney firm in Gainesville that introduced him to construction law. When he went back to law school for his final year, the firm asked him to stay on part time. He continued to work for them through the following summer.

After passing the Florida Bar Exam, Lohrer decided to send out applications to larger law firms. "Construction law is a niche area, so I emphasized my experience on my resume. That's when I sent my resume to a firm in Fort Myers that concentrated on construction law. I was there for three years. Although I learned a lot while I was there and I was very close with a lot of the people there, it was a smaller firm

handling smaller cases. I wanted to move onward and upward."

At the time, Becker & Poliakoff had an opening in their Fort Lauderdale office's construction law department. "They were looking for a younger attorney with some experience, and I fit that bill," Lohrer said. "Fort Myers has a small legal community. Becker had a Fort Myers office, so I'd gotten to know a couple of their lawyers. I got the interview with Becker and I've been with the firm since 2008."

Lohrer continues to serve in the U.S. Army Reserve today. After returning from Iraq, he was selected to become a drill sergeant and spent several years training new soldiers in basic combat training. Lohrer is, currently, the First Sergeant of an Army Reserve drill sergeant unit located in West Palm Beach. He has 23 total years of military service, including time on both active duty and in the Reserves. He began his career as an E1 private and rose through the ranks to become an E8 First Sergeant who was recently selected to the E9 sergeant major list.

Lohrer has advice for young people who are looking to the future. "At various points in my life, I didn't always have a plan," he said. "But I knew that I needed to do something, not just sit around. Time passes quickly and if you're unsure about what to do with your future, a lot of options exist. For me, I got experience in the military and got help with college. I was unsure what the college process was like or what I wanted to do, but I went to SFSC's Admissions Office and talked to people there. They gave me valuable information."

"Just go talk to people, get different perspectives, and learn about different options. When I see people who are adrift, there's always some reason not to move forward, like COVID-19. If you put in the effort, plenty of opportunities are available out there to explore. Life is a lot better if you're trying to improve yourself and you're staying busy and active."

SFSC Radiologic Technologists graduate



COURTESY PHOTO

From left: Amber Morales, Lydia Bolin, Ramon Mora II, Brittanie West, Sabrina Deery, Alexandra Blackman, Abigail Doucet, Niki Rast and Janessa Tamayo.

By Special to Highlands News-Sun Courtesy South Florida State College

AVON PARK — On Thursday, July 22, South Florida State College (SFSC) honored nine of its graduates in a traditional pinning ceremony on the College's Highlands Campus in Avon Park. The graduates have earned their Associate in Science (A.S.) in Radiography.

The graduates honored were Alexandra Blackman (class president), Lydia Bolin, Sabrina Deery, Abigail Doucet, Ramon Mora II, Amber Morales, Niki Rast, Janessa Tamayo, and Brittanie West.

The guest speaker was Etienne Doucet, student life pastor at Grace Bible

Church in Sebring. In addressing the graduates, he said, "My challenge for you as you enter the field is this: I pray that you treat every patient with the same zeal, energy, and passion that you do now. That you never view this as just a job that you have to do to pay bills. But you see patients as what they are and as people. That every interaction you have, although it may feel mundane to you, could be life changing for them."

We don't always have control over how people feel or how they treat us, but we can always control how well we love them and lead them through these moments. I challenge you to be people of passion and integrity, although everyone else

around you may not be. This is just the beginning of a life where you'll grow your careers and education in everything you do going forward."

Upon completing SFSC's two-year A.S. degree in Radiography, graduates can work as certified radiologic technologists by passing the American Registry of Radiologic Technologists (ARRT) national examination. Radiologic technologists work in hospitals and clinics performing diagnostic imaging examinations, such as X-rays.

For information about SFSC's Radiography program, visit southflorida.edu or contact healthsciences@southflorida.edu.



COURTESY PHOTO

The graduates: from DeSoto County, Stephanie Quezada; from Hardee County, Isabella Adams, Joe Byers, Patricia Lopez, Peyton Roberts, Kacie Romero, and Daniella Vazquez; from Polk County, Mesha Estivene. All others from Highlands County.

SFSC practical nursing graduates honored in pinning ceremony

By Special to Highlands News-Sun

COURTESY SOUTH FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE

AVON PARK — South Florida State College (SFSC) graduated 22 Practical Nursing (PN) program students in a traditional pinning ceremony on Monday, Aug. 2 in the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts on the Highlands Campus at SFSC in Avon Park.

The graduates are Isabella Adams, Cassie Bazils, Felicia Bieber, Joe Byers, Zobeida Cram, Ray Nino Gerard Espidol, Mesha Estivene, Brooke Fones, Lorie Karls, Ashley Lehman, Shanice Lewis, Patricia Lopez, Taylor Painter, Na'Talya Perry, Stephanie Quezada, Peyton Roberts, Kacie Romero, Liliana Sanchez, Chantel Stevens, Diana Tello, Daniella Vazquez, and Tiffany Volny.

"You pushed through 1,350 hours of lecture, group work, lab, and clinical," said Mary von Merveldt, director of nursing education, when addressing the graduates. "Your brain grew, your heart grew, and your wings started to spread. Each challenge made you stronger. You've grown into a nurse, a beautiful butterfly ready to soar and share your radiant colors with your patients, your community, and your world. You've worked hard. You've earned this—your pinning ceremony. The pinning ceremony honors our graduates' accomplishments and welcomes them into the profession



COURTESY PHOTO

Class President Felicia Bieber presents the farewell address to the graduates.

of nursing."

Each year, PN graduates award the Golden Duck to someone who has served as a mentor to the students in the program. The D.U.C.K. acronym represents the foundational elements of the mentoring arrangement: Developing, Understanding, Compassion, and Knowledge.

During the ceremony, Class Vice President Ashley Lehman presented the 2021 Golden Duck Award to Candra Polk, SFSC Nursing instructor. "It is my honor to present this award to someone who spent many early mornings, countless hours educating, and a ridiculous amount of time trying to keep us all in a row," Lehman said. "We could not have made it to this point in our nursing education without all of your hard work

and encouragement. We will carry what you have taught us for the rest of our lives."

In her farewell address to fellow graduates, Class President Felicia Bieber said, "As we conclude this chapter of our lives, I would describe this as a time of resilience. In the midst of COVID-19, we embarked on this journey in the health care field. There were many obstacles and last-minute changes, but we overcame and adjusted. The PN program challenged us mentally, emotionally, and physically. We succeeded together and failed together. With resilience, we came together to push through and carry each other to the finish line.

"I want to thank our instructors for the knowledge and skills they have taught us, and we will treasure them beyond

our nursing journey. Thank you for pushing us, challenging us, and teaching us the value of being a good nurse. Thank you for holding us to the highest standards. Thank you for seeing us reach our full potential. I am proud to be a part of the PN class of 2021 and will cherish these months together. I hope each of you stay resilient in your careers as nurses and in your personal lives."

The practice of pinning new graduates has been a nursing school tradition in the United States since 1916 and, symbolically, welcomes each graduate into the nursing profession. The pin is worn prominently on a nurse's uniform throughout their career. One story of the ceremony's beginning goes back to 1883, when Queen Victoria awarded Florence Nightingale the Royal Red Cross on



COURTESY PHOTO

Class Vice President Ashley Lehman presents the Golden Duck award to Nursing instructor Candra Polk.

St. George's Day for her service to the sick and injured during the Crimean War. In turn, Nightingale later extended the honor to her outstanding nursing students by presenting them with a medal of excellence.

Graduates of the 11-month career certificate PN program become licensed practical nurses by passing the National Council Licensure Examination for Practical Nurses (NCLEX-PN) exam. SFSC nursing graduates are usually fully employed in nursing within a few months of graduation.

SFSC offers an Associate in Science degree in Nursing program for students interested in becoming registered nurses: a two-year Generic-RN program, a two-year Evening/Weekend RN program, and a one-year Transition-LPN to RN program. The College also offers a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program. For program entry requirements, consult the SFSC College Catalog online at southflorida.edu, call 863-784-7225, or email healthsciences@southflorida.edu.

Educator of the Year

Educator of the Year

Rockwood is students' 'rock star'

By **MARC VALERO**
STAFF WRITER

LAKE PLACID — The Highlander Awards Educator of the Year honoree is Stacy Rockwood, a Lake Placid Middle School teacher whose impact in the community is big inside and outside the classroom.

Rockwood, an ESE support and facilitation, was nominated by Willie Hills, when he was assistant principal of Lake Placid Middle, and Crystal Baugh, when she was a guidance counselor at Lake Placid Middle. Hills is now the district transportation director and Baugh is a program staffing specialist at the district office.

Rockwood lights up any room she enters with her positive personality and outlook on life. She is amazing in all possible facets of the word and she embodies the term "rock star" teacher. Hills and Baugh stated in nominating Rockwood.

"Miss Rockwood is an asset to our students by always helping them find ways to connect to school or academics as well as helping students find their joy or passions in life. She is known for her ability to break out in spontaneous songs about math language/arts or any other subject that students need help remembering.

"Her dedication and commitment



Stacy Rockwood (center) is the 2021 recipient of the Highlander Awards Educator of the Year. Presenting the award is Sid Valentine, vice president for academic affairs and student services at South Florida State College, and Highlands News-Sun Advertising Director Amanda Young. SFSC was the sponsor of the Educator of the Year award.

to our students allows her to engage many who struggle to be successful in a

typical academic setting." She also continuously pushes herself

to improve her own practice so that she can meet the individual needs of every student with whom she comes in contact, her nomination read.

But, Miss Rockwood's enthusiasm for life and her new community extends beyond the classroom and the school day, they added.

"Shortly after arriving at Lake Placid Middle School, Hurricane Irma blew devastation across our community and without hesitation and despite her recent arrival and the fact that her kitchen roof was in her kitchen sink, she threw herself into delivering necessary yet of ring necessary items to local families, serving food and cleaning up our campus.

Rockwood has adopted the local city league football team and serves as "team mom," a title that has never been more appropriate because she "will get after those boys if they are not doing right."

"Stacy is always smiling, always a positive voice, always a proactive force for kids."

She is the epitome of everything a school would want as a teacher and everything a community needs from a truly invested member.

"Miss Rockwood deserves this award because we just love everything she presents and represent," Hills and Baugh stated.

SFSC sponsors top educator award

AVON PARK — The Educator of the Year was the obvious choice for South Florida State College (SFSC) this year.

Teachers had to overcome immense challenges for the benefit of the community's children and the persistence of education, and they all deserve full support and appreciation.

Many of the teachers in the region are graduates of South Florida State College's Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education (BSEE) program, one of the three bachelor's degrees offered by the college. The BSEE program gives students hands-on experience in the classroom and online, and 98% of BSEE alumni are gainfully employed shortly after graduation.

SFSC focuses on supporting students on their pathway to success through education. With campuses in Highlands, DeSoto and Hardee counties and through its online presence, the college offers certificates, associate degrees, and bachelor's degrees in over 70 programs that lead to the continued success of its graduates and a variety of opportunities for the educational, cultural, and economic advancement of the service district.

Through its Adult Education Department, the college offers developmental courses to learn English, obtain a high school diploma, or strengthen skills in math, reading, and writing. SFSC provides customized training for the workforce at its campus locations and off-site at local businesses through its Corporate and Community Education Department. Non-credit courses are also available for leisure and enrichment.

SFSC is one of the 28 institutions of the Florida College System and has articulation agreements with several Florida universities to provide a seamless transition for SFSC graduates who obtain an associate degree to transfer to a bachelor's degree program within the state.

Beginning this year, the college is supporting students through the introduction of its Panther PATHways that focuses on Preparing, Advising, Teaching, and Helping students as they pursue their educational and professional goals. Panther PATHways will streamline the registration and scheduling process for students resulting in a more efficient



South Florida State College sponsors the 2021 Highlander Awards Educator of the Year Award.

and economical college experience. For more information about South Florida State College and

its variety of programs and services, visit southflorida.edu or call 863-453-6661.

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