

Alumnus Dr. Tony Mancini speaks about family and a career in medicine

Special to the Highlands
News-Sun
PROVIDED BY SFSC

Dr. Joseph Anthony ("Tony") Mancini, an alumnus of South Florida State College (previously South Florida Community College), practices gynecology at Gessler Clinic in Winter Haven. He spoke about his career in medicine.

Where are you originally from?

I was born and raised in Wauchula.

A news clip on the wall in your examining room is about someone in your family who owned a business in New Britain,

Conn. Why do you have the news clip on the wall?

My grandfather started a food processing business in Connecticut. They moved the operation to Zolfo Springs in the 1940s. Mancini Foods makes canned and jarred roasted peppers and is still in business to this day.

The news clip in the office writes about the business, my grandfather being an Italian immigrant, and the value of hard work to be successful. I keep that article up as inspiration.

How/why did your family come to Hardee

County?

My grandfather, my father, and uncle came to Hardee County to start and run the business. My dad met my mom here and they had a family — me and my two brothers. I went to public school here and am a proud graduate of Hardee Senior High School, Class of 1971.

You were in a band once upon a time. Tell us about that. Are you still active as a musician?

I was in a rock band in high school called "Copperfield." And we were quite popular! I was the guitarist. We played high school dances and

other venues. I don't play now, other than for my own enjoyment. I own several guitars in my collection.

Why did you decide to attend SFCC?

I attended SFCC because of convenience and to get my Associate in Arts (A.A.) before transferring to a four-year school. I got a great education and was able to work and save money. I graduated from SFCC in 1973 after completing some of the pre-med requisites. I went on to major in Biology at Florida Southern College in Lakeland and graduated in 1975.

Why did you choose to go to medical school at St. George's University School of Medicine in Grenada?

I went to Grenada School of Medicine because it was difficult to get into med school in the United States and, rather than wait listing, I could start there immediately.

Why did you choose to go into medicine? Did anyone or an incident inspire you?

I was inspired to go into medicine, mainly, because we had a great group of doctors at Palmetto Medical Clinic in Wauchula — Drs. Palmer, Sayre, and Carmichael. I knew I wanted to be like them.

Why did you choose to go into obstetrics/gynecology?

I went into obstetrics/gynecology because it is mostly a happy specialty — delivering babies. I retired from obstetrics five years ago, now focusing on gynecology. I've delivered the children



COURTESY/SFSC

Dr. Tony Mancini and his grandson Domenico.

of many of my current patients. I have also practiced long enough to have patients whom I actually delivered!

How long have you had your practice at Gessler Clinic in Winter Haven? What aspects of your career have brought you the most pride or joy?

I have been in practice since 1986 — four years in Lake Wales and going on 30 years at Gessler Clinic. I take pride in caring for my patients. I loved delivering babies. I'm thankful I'm able to continue practicing gynecology.

You have a brother who is also a physician.

My brother is an internist in Winter Park, Florida. He is three years younger than I.

Do you have any children who have followed in your footsteps and gone into medicine?

I have three children and two grandsons. My daughter, Katie, who lives outside Rochester, New York, is married and has two sons ages 5 and 8. Meredith lives in Chicago and is a

recruiter for Robert Half, a staffing firm. My son, Trey, is a Major League Baseball player, who is the first baseman for the Baltimore Orioles. None of them are in medicine, but that's fine as long as they are happy.

In what ways did SFCC assist you in preparing you for your career? What advice would you give to young people (or people interested in changing careers) about going into medicine? About getting an education?

SFCC was a great place to begin my education. It had small classes, and it was easy to gain access to your instructors. Of course, I went there in the early days of the College and I can only imagine how great a place it is to attend now!

Medicine as a whole is a very rewarding career no matter what specialty you choose, and SFSC is a great place to get the foundation you need.

SFSC Practical Nursing students earn 100% pass rate

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PROVIDED BY SFSC NURSING
EDUCATION

AVON PARK — Of the 22 students who recently graduated from South Florida State College's (SFSC) Practical Nursing (PN) program, 100% passed the required national licensure examination, the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX-PN).

"To practice nursing within the United States (and in many other countries), one has to secure a nursing license," said Mary von Merveldt, director of nursing education at SFSC. "In Florida, this requires graduation from an approved program, passing background screenings, and successful completion of the national licensure exam. Practical nursing licenses are issued by a graduate's state of residence and are valid for practice within this state. However, Florida is part of the National Licensure Compact (NLC), so graduates meeting the requirements for multi-state license can practice in many states with the Florida multistate license. Currently, 38 states participate."

The NCLEX-PN measures knowledge and expertise of the essential skills required to safely enter the field of practical nursing. It is a five-hour exam that consists of between 85 and 205 questions and covers five categories: a safe and effective care environment; safety and infection control; knowledge of expected stages of growth and development

and prevention and/or early detection of health problems; care in promoting and supporting emotional, mental, and social well-being of clients; and comfort to clients and assistance in the performance of activities of daily living. The National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) develops and administers the NCLEX.

"High NCLEX-PN pass rates speak to the quality and high standards of SFSC's practical nursing program," von Merveldt said. "Exceptional, caring instructors and dedicated students make a commitment to excellence in nursing education and practice. Graduates improve their career outlook and better the future health of our community through their actions."

According to von Merveldt, "Historically, employment of all SFSC nursing graduates has consistently neared 100%. From speaking with our

students, we know that most are readily offered employment. Some have even secured employment prior to graduation, pending practical nursing licensure."

SFSC's Practical Nursing Career Certificate is an 11-month, full-time day program. Other Nursing programs offered through SFSC are: the two-year, full-time day Generic Nursing (RN) Associate in Science (A.S.); the two-year evening and weekend Generic Nursing (RN) Associate in Science (A.S.); the 13-month, full-time, day Transition Nursing (LPN to RN) Associate in Science (A.S.); and the online Bachelor of Science in Nursing (RN to BSN). For more information about any of SFSC's Nursing programs, visit southflorida.edu or email healthsciences@southflorida.edu.

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SFSC Take Stock in Children student scholar is Leaders for Life Fellowship finalist

Special to the Highlands News-Sun

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AVON PARK — Braden Beaney, a senior attending DeSoto County High School, was surprised in his classroom when his teacher, family, friends, and his Take Stock in Children mentor broke the news that he had been named a finalist for the Take Stock in Children Leaders for Life fellowship. He is one of 12 finalists vying for six Leaders for Life Fellowships.

The Fellowship, which recognizes student leaders, comes with a \$40,000 scholarship that covers non-tuition expenses, such as housing, books, and transportation. As a Leaders for Life finalist, Beaney received a MacBook laptop computer and has been asked to submit a video essay to be considered for the Leaders for Life Fellowship.

The Leaders for Life Scholarship is an initiative of the Asofsky Family Foundation, which supports programs aimed at helping the state's youth. The Foundation awards the scholarship in partnership with Take Stock in Children. The South Florida State College (SFSC) Foundation is the lead agency for Take Stock within the College's service district of DeSoto, Hardee, and Highlands counties.

Beaney is eligible for the Leaders for Life Fellowship because of his participation in Take Stock in Children. Take Stock is a statewide program that provides at-risk children with a mentor and a college scholarship. In return, Take Stock scholars sign contracts in which they promise to remain drug-free, to avoid behavior that would get them into trouble with law enforcement, to attend school regularly, and to earn satisfactory grades. The students' parents also sign the contracts and agree to provide home environments conducive to education. The local Take Stock program was established in 1996 and has awarded college scholarships to more than 521 local students.

Beaney graduates from DeSoto County High School in spring 2022. As a dual enrollment student through South Florida State College (SFSC), he anticipates graduating from the College with an Associate in Arts in spring 2022, as well. Beaney plans to earn a bachelor's degree in Biology from his dream school, the University of Florida. His ultimate goal is to become a medical doctor in psychiatry to conduct research on mental disorders and the treatment of those illnesses.

In his young life, Beaney already understands what it means to take charge in a crisis. Over the years, he has assisted in caring for his stepfather, who has multiple sclerosis. And when his mother broke her foot, he became his mother's main caretaker. In the workplace, Beaney has taken on leadership roles. He worked at

Winn-Dixie supermarket for a year as a cashier and was entrusted with training new employees. He has served his school and community while participating in organizations, such as the National Honor Society, Students Working Against Tobacco (SWAT), Students Against Destruction Decisions (SADD), and the Green/Environmental club.

Dale Wolgast, a retired school principal from the DeSoto County School District, has mentored Beaney through Take Stock in Children for the past three years.

"One of the things foundations, and those accepting students into universities, look for are completers," Wolgast said. "Will they finish what they start and on time? Braden checks all those boxes when it comes to finishing and completing something he starts. This scholarship would put him over the edge to be able to afford to go to a major university and go into the field of medicine that he desires. He's one of the greatest kids I've ever met and, as a retired school principal, I've met a lot of them."

Since the inception of the Leaders for Life Fellowship program, the local Take Stock in Children program has had 14 finalists and, of those, eight have gone on to become winners of the \$40,000 non-tuition scholarship.

"In Highlands, Hardee, and DeSoto counties, you run a great Take Stock in Children program," said Marilyn Stewart, director of Take Stock in Children's Leaders for Life Fellowship program. "The staff has been wonderful. The process and management is great. You all do a great job with the students."

"I've been working for Take Stock in Children for 22 years and I'm never complacent with it. I'm always surprised at the grit and determination that these students have. There are low income, high-achieving students from across Florida. They come from all walks of life. If they're given the opportunity to succeed — with a good mentor, with some financial backing, and some positive support — they will thrive."

"The Leaders for Life Fellowship finalists and winners are the top of the crop," Stewart said. "Often, they don't even need the Fellowship. A lot of the students achieve all kinds of grants and scholarships on their own. The Fellowship is not really a scholarship, although there are financial benefits to being in the program. But to be in the Leaders for Life Fellowship, we provide leadership, annual conferences, and mentoring. Other students who've gone before these students will reach out and mentor them. We have former Leaders for Life Fellowship students who work at Google and Microsoft. We have three medical doctors who are Fellowship members. They're all willing to reach out and help the students coming along, to talk with them and share their experiences with them. That's what's really beautiful about Leaders for Life."

To learn more about Take Stock in Children in DeSoto, Hardee, and Highlands counties, contact 863-784-7343 or tsic@southflorida.edu.

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SFSC eligible for 2023 Aspen Prize

Special to Highlands News-Sun provided by South Florida State College

Nov 8, 2021

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Aspen Institute named South Florida State College one of the 150 institutions eligible to compete for the \$1 million Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, the nation's signature recognition of high achievement and performance among America's community colleges. The colleges selected for this honor stand out among more than 1,000 community colleges nationwide as having high and improving levels of student success as well as equitable outcomes for Black and Hispanic students and those from lower-income backgrounds.

The 150 eligible colleges have been invited to submit data and narratives as the next steps in an intensive data and practice review process, culminating in the announcement of the Prize winner in spring 2023.

"The recognition from The Aspen Institute affirms that SFSC is a top-performing college due to quality learning initiatives led by a stellar faculty," said Dr. Thomas C. Leitzel, SFSC president. "By analyzing the data Aspen collects, SFSC far exceeds performance indicators in such areas as number of credentials awarded, graduation rates, and overall student success."

The Aspen Prize spotlights exemplary community colleges in order to elevate the sector, drive attention to colleges doing the best work, and discover and share highly effective student success and equity strategies. Since 2010, Aspen has chosen to focus intensively on community colleges because they are, as First Lady Dr. Jill Biden stated at the 2021 Aspen Prize ceremony, "a powerful engine of prosperity."

But student outcomes vary enormously among community colleges, and improving those outcomes is essential to securing our nation's economic future, strengthening communities, and ensuring that diverse populations experience economic mobility and prosperity. With these goals in mind, the Aspen Prize honors colleges with outstanding achievement in five critical areas: teaching and learning, certificate and degree completion, transfer and bachelor's attainment, workforce success, and equity for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.

"In an era of persistent inequity and workforce talent gaps, our nation's best community colleges are stepping up to deliver more degrees to increasingly diverse students so they are prepared for the good jobs waiting to be filled," said Josh Wyner, executive director of the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program. "Leaders of exceptional community colleges understand that achieving excellence requires expanding college access and increasing degree completion, but it doesn't stop there. They are committed to ensuring that all students — including students of color and those from low-income backgrounds—graduate with the skills needed to secure a job with family-sustaining wages or successfully transfer to and graduate from a university. That same commitment that stands at the center of the Aspen Prize: to advance the goals of social mobility and equitable talent development."

The eligible colleges represent the diversity and depth of the community college sector. Located in urban, rural, and suburban areas across 34 states, these colleges serve as few as 230 students and as many as 57,000. Winning colleges have ranged from smaller institutions serving rural community and smaller towns.—including Lake Area

Technical Institute (SD, 2017 Prize winner) and Walla Walla Community College (WA, 2013) — to large community colleges serving major metropolitan areas, including Miami Dade College (2019) and San Antonio College (TX, 2021).

The four other previous winners are Indian River State College (FL, 2019); Santa Fe College (FL, 2015); Santa Barbara City College (CA, 2013); and Valencia College (FL, 2011).

In this first round, eligibility for the Aspen Prize is based on publicly available data. Eligible colleges must show strong and improving student outcomes in key areas such as retention, completion, transfer, and equity. Nationwide, 15 percent of community colleges (150 of the approximately 1,000 public two-year colleges nationwide assessed for the Prize) have been invited to apply—the full list can be accessed on the Prize homepage.

The next steps in the process include:

Selection of the top ten finalists by an expert panel of 15 experts in community colleges, higher education, and workforce training, to be announced in spring/summer 2022

Fall 2022 site visits to each of the ten finalists, during which the Aspen Institute and partners will collect additional information, including employment and earnings data and insights about promising practices. A distinguished jury will meet and make award decisions in the first quarter of early 2023, with the announcement of the Aspen Prize in late spring 2023.

For a full list of the top 150 eligible institutions and to read more on the selection process, visit highered.aspeninstitute.org/aspen-prize. The Aspen Prize is generously funded by Ascendium and the Joyce Foundation.

The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program aims to advance higher education practices, policies, and leadership that significantly improve student outcomes, especially for the growing population of low-income students and students of color on American campuses. For more information, visit highered.aspeninstitute.org and [linkedin.com/showcase/aspenhighered](https://www.linkedin.com/showcase/aspenhighered), and follow @AspenHigherEd on Twitter. The Aspen Prize hashtag is #AspenPrize.

'Carousel in Concert' Opens SFSC Artist Series

BY DEBORAH BELL
LATTER

Special to The Herald-Advocate

In 1999, Time magazine proclaimed Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Carousel* the best musical of the 20th century. South Florida State College (SFSC) presents *Carousel* in Concert on Saturday, Nov. 20 at 7 p.m. at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts on the Highlands Campus in Avon Park, Fla.

Carousel follows the tempestuous romance between the swaggering carousel barker, Billy Bigelow, and mill worker, Julie Jordan. This American classic features some of Rodgers and Hammerstein's most iconic pieces, including "If I Loved You," "Mister Snow," "June Is Bustin' Out All Over," and the iconic "You'll Never Walk Alone."

"*Carousel* is a classic American musical," said Cindy Garren, director of cultural arts at SFSC. "Its powerful message about forgiveness and the gorgeous theater arts is inspiring. This is a must-see for theater lovers."

Carousel in Concert stars Broadway actor/singer/producer Ciaran Sheehan.

Born in Dublin, Sheehan made his Broadway debut as Marius in *Le Misérables* and eventually as Raoul in *The Phantom of the Opera*. He then starred in the coveted role of the phantom for over 1,000 performances. Sheehan has starred in numerous productions with The Irish Repertory Company, sold-out four performances at Carnegie Hall in New York, and appeared on *Law and Order*, *One Life to Live*, *Another World*, *Late Night with David Letterman*, and on PBS nationally.

Critic Jeremy Gerard from *Hollywood Variety* wrote, "Sheehan has the kind of soaring stage voice from which indelible Broadway moments are made — the best yet."

Dawn Cantwell, who stars as Julie, originated the role of Young Meg in *Sting's Broadway musical, The Last Ship*. She costarred in *Wicked* as Nessarose and in numerous roles in national tours of *Les Misérables*, *The Master Class*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. She is currently a faculty member at the New York Conservatory for Dramatic Arts.

"This is a concert version of the play," Garren said. "The performers narrate the

story. There's no dancing or scenery because the focus is on the music with a cast of Broadway performers who are flying here from New York City to our stage."

Upcoming Artist Series performances include: The Gatlin Brothers Country & Christmas; Elvis Birthday Bash starring Mike Albert, Scott Bruce, and The Big E Band; *The World of Musicals*; Grammy award winner Lee Ann Womack; Argentina Tango Fire; The Simon & Garfunkel Story; National Dance Company of Ireland in *Rhythm of the Dance*; and Neil Berg's 50 Years of Rock & Roll — Part 2.

Tickets for *Carousel* in Concert start at \$27 and are available online at sfs-carts.org or at the SFSC Box Office at 863-784-7178. The box office located at 600 West College Drive in Avon Park on the campus of South Florida State College. Subscriptions are available for the nine-show series.

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.



The SFSC Artist Series will open Saturday, Nov. 20, with 'Carousel in Concert.'

COURTESY PHOTO/SFSC



MARC VALERO/STAFF

Santa and Mrs. Claus at the lighting of the Christmas tree Tuesday morning in the grand lobby of the Hotel Jacaranda.

Hotel Jacaranda lights the Christmas Tree

By MARC VALERO
STAFF WRITER

AVON PARK — The Hotel Jacaranda brought a cheer from the young and young-at-heart alike Tuesday with the lighting of the Christmas tree in the Grand Lobby of the historic structure.

Santa and Mrs. Claus were on hand for the festivities as they posed for photos with the little ones and not so little ones.

South Florida State College Foundation Executive Director Jamie Bateman said Santa and Mrs. Claus came down from the North Pole for the tree-lighting occasion, a new tradition that started last year.

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TREE

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The tree lighting was done last year in connection with the Jacaranda Jubilee, Bateman said. When the Christmas parade was canceled (due to the pandemic) the tree was relocated from the veranda and put in the foyer. They invited Santa and Mrs. Claus and it was such a popular thing they decided to do it again this year.

"It was a great turnout. This is fun," Bateman said.

With the tree lighting, winter resident/Jacaranda pianist Jeff Klein played "Oh Christmas Tree" and "The Christmas Song" and performed other holiday favorites such as "Do You



MARC VALERO/STAFF

Santa and Mrs. Clause with Hotel Jacaranda pianist Jeff Klein who played Christmas tunes for the lighting of the Hotel Jacaranda's Christmas tree.

Hear What I Hear?" and "Little Drummer Boy."

Sebring resident Nettie Bodenweiser has visited the Jacaranda Hotel the past couple of years to see the wonderful decorations and came

Tuesday to witness the tree lighting.

After the tree lighting many stayed for lunch at the Jacaranda Restaurant.

From the Joan Hartt Grand Lobby to the

Arcade, holiday splendor is most evident at the Hotel Jacaranda.

SFSC Foundation Board Member and donor Joan Hartt helps each year with the decorations.

Bateman said Hartt has an amazing team come in and just makes it look beautiful.

From Dec. 4-23, Santa and Mrs. Claus will be at the Hotel Jacaranda noon to 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays and 5-7 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays.

Enjoy the holiday decor throughout the hotel and, starting on Dec. 7, dinner at the Jacaranda Restaurant.

The Hotel Jacaranda, which opened in 1926, is on Main Street (19 E. Main St.); or known by the locals as the Mile-long Mall, in Avon Park.

Grammy Award Winner Michael W. Smith To Perform Christmas Concert At SFSC

By **DEBORAH BELL LATTER**
Special To The Herald-Advocate

Grammy and Dove Award winning Christian artist, Michael W. Smith, performs his only Christmas concert in Florida on Monday, Dec. 13 at 7 p.m. at the 1,460-seat Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts on the Highlands Campus of South Florida State College (SFSC) in Avon Park.

"This is my absolute favorite time of the year and I am so happy to be back on the road," Smith said. This performance is presented by Balsam Hill, a Christmas décor company.

Smith has been releasing new music regularly and performing around the world to sold-out crowds for the over 35 years. During his storied career, he's written and recorded over 36 No. 1 songs. He has been honored with three Grammy Awards, 45 Dove Awards, and one American Music Award. Smith was inducted into the Gospel Music Hall of Fame and has sold over 15 million albums. Amassing an in-depth catalog of achievements, a myriad of legendary performers recently honored him with a star-studded tribute concert in Nashville, Tenn. to celebrate his 35 No. 1 hits.

Smith's recent USA Today, Yahoo! Music, and Billboard-acclaimed studio album, "A Million Lights and Parade," and Good Morning America-featured and Grammy-nominated live worship album, "Surrounded," have together become his 30th and 31st Top 10 hits on Billboard's Top Christian Albums chart, more than any other solo artist in history.

His most recent album, "Still Vol. 1," is an atmospheric listening experience of improvisational music coupled with inspirational scriptures. More than just an outstanding songwriter and performer, Smith has given back to the global community throughout his career. Smith has raised funds to battle AIDS in Africa; started Rocketown, a safe haven for young people in Tennessee to meet and find hope; and has helped over 70,000 children through Compassion International. He has also written several bestselling books, including "Old Enough to Know" and "Friends are Friends Forever."

Smith's heavily praised "Michael W. Smith & Friends: The Spirit of Christmas" features collaborations with Vince Gill, Lady Antebellum, Little Big Town, Martina McBride, Carrie Underwood, Jennifer Nettles, Bono, Michael McDonald, and Amy Grant.

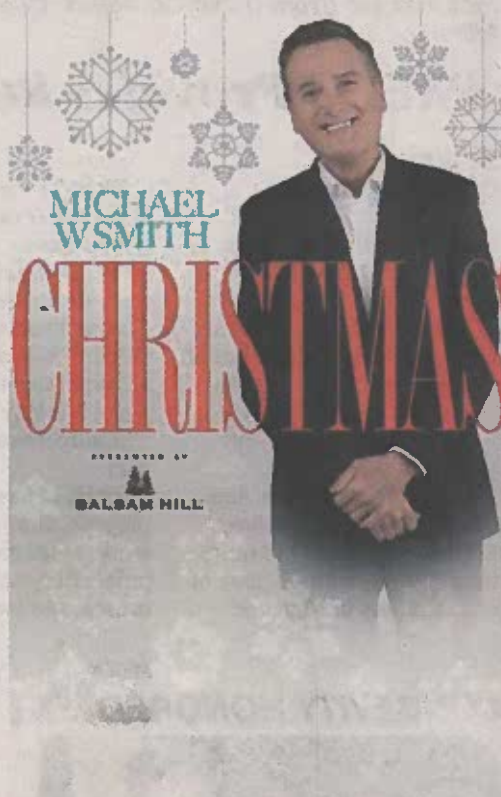
Tickets for the special holiday concert are \$75, \$60, \$50, and \$44. The Wildstein Center is located at 600 West College Drive in Avon Park. Tickets are available online at sfscarts.org or by calling the SFSC Box Of-

ice at 863-784-7178.

South Florida State College (SFSC) presents more than 35 nationally and internationally touring artists at the 1,460-seat Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts located on the Highlands Campus at 600 West College Drive in Avon Park. SFSC offers a Matinee Series for adults at leisure, Young People's Theater Series for school performances, Jazz Series, Trending Now Series of contemporary, family shows, and the popular Artist Series. The performances are underwritten in part by funding from the Florida Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs, the National Endowment for the Arts, and South Arts.

Upcoming performances include: a free performance of Holiday Traditions Around the World on Dec. 12; Elvis Birthday Bash with Mike Albert and Scot Bruce with the Big E Band on Jan. 8; Lee Ann Womack on Jan. 22; The Four Freshman on Jan. 25; Tango Fire on Jan. 29 and The Simon and Garfunkel Story on Feb. 9.

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.



COURTESY PHOTO/SFSC
Michael W. Smith will perform a Christmas concert on Monday, Dec. 13, at the Center for the Performing Arts at South Florida State College.



COURTESY PHOTO/SFSC

South Florida State College's Tau Epsilon Chapter of Phi Theta Kappa inducted 24 new students on Nov. 19. Phi Theta Kappa is the honor society for students enrolled in two-year academic programs at state and community colleges.

SFSC Inducts 24 Students Into Honor Society

By **SHARON JONES**
Special To The Herald-Advocate

SFSC inducted 24 students into its Tau Epsilon chapter of the Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) honor society on Friday, Nov. 19.

With families and fellow students looking on, the inductees recited an oath of membership, joining the honor society that recognizes distinguished academic achievement by students enrolled in two-year academic programs.

The guest speaker was Dr. Mark Bukowski, SFSC's dean of student services. He advised students not to dwell on day-to-day annoyances but to focus on making an impact that would last into the future. He encouraged each new inductee to look for their own unique ways to be helpers to their fellow students and in their communities.

"Leave a lasting impression on people you work with and

see every day. Never take for granted the effect you have on other people. You may not think about it on a daily basis, but you have a huge effect on other people's lives and how successful they are."

Dr. Bukowski said simple courtesy goes a long way in sustaining other people and that a simple smile to another person passing by in the hall may be the only encouragement they've had all day.

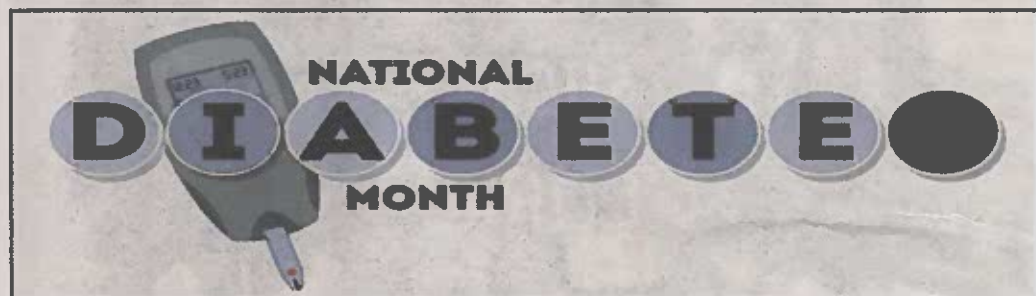
"Remember, we're all fundamentally the same," Dr. Bukowski said. "We want to be appreciated. We want to feel secure. We want to meet our potential. We want to have the opportunity to be successful. No matter what your demographic or what kind of background you come from, we all want to be treated with respect and to reach our potential. These are things that begin with each one of us helping to lay the groundwork for future generations."

As the ceremony drew to a

close, the inductees each signed the honor society's membership book, recording their status as scholars of distinction at SFSC. When the auditorium lights dimmed, each scholar lit a candle signifying their fellowship in the society and received a white rose.

The 2021 PTK officers are Katherine Summers, president; Chiya Gilliam, vice president; Navishti Singh, secretary; Suzanne DelGrosso, treasurer; and Carol Mitchell, public relations. For more information about SFSC's Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, visit southflorida.edu/current-students/student-activities-clubs/phi-theta-kappa.

Sharon Jones is the community relations coordinator at South Florida State College and can be reached at 863-784-7151 or Sharon.Jones@southflorida.edu.



The Gatlin Brothers to perform Country & Christmas at SFSC

By **MARC VALERO**
STAFF WRITER



COURTESY PHOTO

The Gatlin Brothers will be performing at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts in Avon Park on Thursday, Dec. 2 at 7 p.m. From left: Steve, Larry and Rudy Gatlin.

AVON PARK — The Grammy-Award winning trio of Larry, Steve, and Rudy: The Gatlin Brothers, will perform one night only at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts in Avon Park on Thursday, Dec. 2 at 7 p.m.

Dazzling audiences for more than 60 years, the Gatlin Brothers have seven No. 1 singles, 32 Top 40 records, 22 studio albums, and five BMI "Million-Air" awards. Throughout their career, they have amassed numerous awards including a Grammy for Best Country Song ("Broken Lady"), three ACM awards for Single of the Year ("All the Gold in California"), and Album of the Year ("Straight Ahead").

"The Gatlin Brothers have entertained audiences in some of the world's largest venues and now they are coming to Avon Park, with some Christmas cheer," said Cindy Garren, director of cultural programs at South Florida State College. "I'm sure many people remember their variety show on ABC — Larry Gatlin and the Gatlin Brothers."

The Gatlin Brothers kicked off their Country & Christmas shows a week ago in Branson, Missouri and have four holiday shows with top country artists at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, so it's a

treat to have the talented trio coming to Highlands County at SFSC.

Highlands News-Sun spoke by phone recently to Rudy Gatlin.

When asked how they've continued with a busy tour schedule, Gatlin replied, "We've just always been into hard work and clean living that's how we do it. We've been fortunate to have good health and we need the money," he said with a laugh. "We still enjoy doing it."

They used to do around 100 shows a year, but now it's down to a manageable 30 to 60 shows a year, Gatlin said.

Highlands News-Sun asked Rudy Gatlin about the unique vocal harmonies that siblings are able to create.

The harmonies are a little closer and

little tighter with all family groups, from the Osmonds to the Lennon Sisters to the McGuire Sisters, Andrew Sisters, and Michael Jackson and his brothers, he said. It is the physical makeup of the vocal cords.

"Then there is the other part — when you are singing together for all those years you kind of know what each of the others is going to do," Gatlin said. "Of course ours is real easy, Larry sings lead, I sing the high harmonies and Steve sings the low harmonies, all the time."

"When we were kids we grew up singing and didn't think too much about it, but not everybody does this."

Growing up, the brothers played football, baseball and just lived normal lives. They sang in church on the

weekends and sang at concerts and then later on started thinking about doing it as a career, Gatlin said.

"We started thinking — wouldn't it be neat to do what the Osmonds are doing," he said with a laugh. "We are good friends with them, but I remember as kids they were singing on the Andy Williams Show and we're here singing in Odessa (Texas)."

While the Gatlin Brothers were in Odessa, the Osmond Brothers were in Los Angeles where Andy Williams was. Williams saw the Osmonds performing at a theme park and invited them to be on his television show, Gatlin said. "We laughed about that for years."

The Gatlin Brothers first ventured to Nashville in the early 1970s where they made their mark in country music and hit the top of the charts.

The Gatlin Brothers performance is sponsored by Sharion Hudson at All Around Septic and Sewer, and Suzanne and Joe Wright at V & W Farms.

Tickets for the show start at \$40. Tickets can be purchased online at sfsCARTS.org, by phone at 863-784-7178, or by visiting the SFSC Box Office at 600 W. College Drive in Avon Park on the Highlands Campus of South Florida State College.