

SFSC Foundation Hosts Million Dollar Hole-In-One Golf Shootout To Benefit Athletics

The South Florida State College (SFSC) Foundation will host its 5th annual Million Dollar Hole-in-One Golf Shootout at Sun 'N Lake Golf Club with qualifying rounds taking place on Thursday, Jan. 13 and Friday, Jan. 14 from 11:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m. and on Saturday, Jan. 15 from 7:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.

The final round will take place on Sunday, Jan. 16 at 9 a.m.

Proceeds from the Golf Shootout benefit the SFSC Athletic Department. SFSC fields four athletic teams: women's volleyball, women's cross country, men's baseball, and women's softball.

"We are excited again to host the Million Dollar Hole-in-One Golf Shootout," said Rick Hitt, SFSC Athletic Director. "Since the inaugural Shootout, we have given out thousands of dollars in prize money to our qualifiers and we look forward to doing it again this year in hopes of delivering on the grand prize of \$1 million. This community has supported athletics at every level every year that I can remember in the 34 years of my coaching career. We look forward to the enjoyment of the qualifying rounds and the excitement and enthusiasm that the final round of the Million Dollar Hole-in-One Golf Shootout brings."

Amateur adult golfers are eligible to participate in the Shootout and compete for \$1 million provided through Putting Hole-in-One Shootouts Prize Promotions. If no one sinks a hole-in-one, the closest shots to the hole will win prizes. First place will receive \$750, second place will receive \$500, third

will receive \$250, and fourth will receive a pro shop gift card from Sun 'N Lake Golf Club. Golfers can purchase a bag of 10 balls for \$10. Participants may purchase an unlimited number of bags.

"We are thankful to everyone who supports SFSC by participating in our Million Dollar Hole-in-One Golf Shootout," said Jamie Bateman, executive director of institutional advancement at SFSC. "The success of this event is made possible by our generous donors and sponsors who take the lead in ensuring our students have the means to succeed in their goals of higher education. Our athletes and all our students are blessed because of everyone who comes out to play."

Sponsorships for the Shootout are still available. For more information about the Million Dollar Hole-in-One Golf Shootout or sponsoring the event, contact the SFSC Foundation at 863-453-3133 or foundation@southflorida.edu.

The South Florida State College (SFSC) Foundation enhances community awareness of the College, solicits and accepts gifts, receives bequests, and manages and helps to appreciate cash gifts or non-cash gifts donated to the SFSC Foundation. Such contributions are tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law. Funds received by the SFSC Foundation are distributed to endeavors that benefit the college and subsidize its students, staff, and programs. The SFSC Foundation offers scholarships and provides funding to maintain educational facilities.



COURTESY PHOTOS

SFSC Student Commencement Speaker: Dr. Mark Bukowski (left), dean of student services, presented Madeline Charles, SFSC student Commencement speaker, with a plaque during the ceremony.

SFSC Graduates Celebrate A Milestone In Their Academic Life

By DEBORAH BELL
LATTER

Special To The Herald-Advocate

For the South Florida State College (SFSC) graduates who gathered in the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts on Thursday, Dec. 16, the 2021 Commencement ceremony was a time to celebrate.

Student Commencement speaker Madeline J. Charles, who received her Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), spoke to her fellow classmates. She recounted her mother's personal challenge: In spite of having Lupus, she went on to earn a degree in Criminal Justice.

Charles overcame her own life challenge: She became a teenage parent. With self-termination and support from the community, she completed high school and followed her dream to become a nurse.

Charles urged the graduates to celebrate their accomplishments of today, "so that tomorrow you can walk through a new door."

"The friends and resources you have gained during this chapter of your life will hold you up through life's difficulties. Even when the corridor to your next door seems dark, have faith that God has what is best in store for you," she said. "A wise man once told me, 'When a door is opened in your life, that means God is working in your life.' Walk confidently through that door. I hope I have left you with courage for the next chapter in your lives."

Early in the program, Tami

Cullens, chair of the SFSC Board of Trustees addressed the graduates.

"From all the terms used to describe graduates, the one that should receive top billing is 'winner.' Each of you is a winner," Cullens said. "You have demonstrated through hard work, dependability, and conscientiousness that you have what it takes to continue in your life, no matter what that may be. As you leave this theater ... hold your head high and smile with joy in your heart, because you are a winner."

The graduates received congratulations and further words of wisdom from Dr. Thomas Leitzel, SFSC president.

"You have a name that we will remember as you leave us and move on to your next opportunity. I ask you to also remember our name, since we may serve as a reference for you, but also remember South Florida State College, a name that many recognize for excellence and a name that along with yours will propel you to success in your future endeavors. And for that, I simply wish you the very best," Leitzel said.

During the ceremony, Dr. Leitzel gave special recognition to Erik Christensen, dean of applied sciences and technologies, who retires from SFSC on Dec. 17 after having served the College for over 17 years. He also honored Helen Shoemaker, professor of nursing, who retires from SFSC on Jan. 14 after having taught at the College for 27 years.

Approximately 346 stu-

dents met the SFSC requirements by fall Commencement.

Of these, 26 received their Bachelor of Science in Supervision and Management (BAS-SM), four received their Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), one received their Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education (BSEE), 108 received their Associate in Arts, 51 received their Associate in Science, 45 received their State of Florida High School diplomas, and 111 received career certificates or college credit certificates. Students participating in the Commencement ceremony totaled 125.

Mace bearer and chief marshal for Commencement was Thomas Bush, and marshals were Joan Briand, Kathleen Capo, Jennifer Groves, Robert Hampton, Dr. Theresa James, Cindy Kinser, Garrett Lee, Michelle Macbeth, Ricardo Pantoja, Dr. Mintoo Patel, Andrew Polk, and Tina Stetson.

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.

Award-Winning Artist Exhibits At MOFAC

By **DEBORAH BELL
LATTER**

Special To The Herald-Advocate

The Museum of Florida Art and Culture (MOFAC) on South Florida State College's (SFSC) Highlands Campus in Avon Park presents "Mindscapes," now through March 25.

The exhibit features the intaglios and drawings of award-winning artist Elizabeth Grange Okulski Coachman, M.D. An Artist Reception and Talk will be held on Wednesday, Jan. 19 at 12:30 p.m. in the Museum.

Coachman grew up near Chicago in a family of punsters and art appreciators. After initially studying advertising design at Philadelphia's Moore College of Art, she transferred to Rutgers University's Biology Department in Camden, N.J. with aspirations toward medical illustration work. Somehow, she morphed into a pre-med major but continued drawing and painting.

Coachman married young and the U.S. Navy sent her first husband to serve in semitropical Okinawa, Japan where she was a civilian medical lab assistant and a freelance artist. Her exotic experiences while creating paintings for an outlandish American nightclub entertainer were memorable. Coachman's travel left an indelible impression on her.

Back in the United States, Coachman acquired an M.D. at Philadelphia's Temple University School of Medicine. In her spare time, she drew humorous illustrations for the school's yearbook and advertising posters for her medical class. Retiring after 20 years in hospital pathology practice, she studied drawing, painting, and printmaking at the Fine Art Center in Dunedin, Fla. There she won several awards including a best of show for print work.

In 1998, Coachman remarried, moved to a Florida cattle ranch and spent several summers in a 17th century fishing village in Newfoundland, Canada. She belonged to St. Michael's Printshop, learned carborundum mezzotint technique, and sold prints and



'Florida Fish Camp' by Elizabeth Coachman is one of the pieces now on display at the Museum of Florida Art in Avon Park.

landscape paintings through the now-closed St. John's gallery.

Much of Coachman's visual pun intaglio work was in her first solo exhibit of 88 works, held in Tarpon Springs, Fla., and called, "Fun and Other Words." She is a charter member of and has exhibited with the Floridian printmaking group, 24 Hands.

The solo exhibit at MOFAC on the Highlands Campus of SFSC includes intaglios and intricate graphite drawings. Intaglios are a general term for metal-plate printmaking techniques, including etching, dry point, engraving, aquatint, and mezzotint.

The word comes from the Italian *intagliare*, meaning "to incise" or "to carve." In intaglio printing, the lines or areas that hold the ink are incised below the surface of the plate, and printing relies on the pressure of a press to force damp paper into these incised lines or areas, to pick up ink.

MOFAC is open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays, 12:30-4:30 p.m. Admission is free. For information, call MOFAC at 863-784-7240.

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.



'Strength' by Elizabeth Coachman is one of the art pieces now on display at the Museum of Florida Art.



Award-Winning Artist Exhibits At MOFAC



SPORTS

• LOCAL

Sunday, January 16, 2022

Rick Hitt, SFSC Athletic Director, Becomes President of American Baseball Coaches Association

SPECIAL TO THE HIGHLANDS NEWS-SUN

AVON PARK – Rick Hitt, athletic director and head baseball coach at South Florida State College (SFSC), was recently named president of the American Baseball Coaches Association (ABCA) and, officially, took office on Friday, Jan. 7, during ABCA's annual convention



HITT

the ABCA membership to serve as ABCA fourth vice president in 2018. Since

in Chicago. Hitt initially joined the ABCA Board of Directors while serving as the Junior College Division Chair before being selected by

that time, he has served simultaneously on the ABCA's Board of Directors while progressing up the vice-presidential ladder. As second vice president in 2020, Hitt was tasked with arranging all of the clinic speakers for the 2021 ABCA Convention, which was held virtually.

In addition to Hitt, each of the ABCA's vice presidents moved up one

seat. Jim Schlossnagle of Texas A&M University is first vice president, Matt Noone of Babson College is second vice president, and Bob Whalen of Dartmouth College is third vice president. John McCormack of Florida Atlantic University was voted by the ABCA membership in fall 2021 to serve as fourth vice

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president in 2022. "I am grateful to have the opportunity to represent SFSC, Region 8 and the NJCAA in this position," Hitt said. "The ABCA organization is an outstanding group. To have been accepted as a member of the board of directors several years ago and to serve coaches worldwide is amazing. I owe a great deal of thanks and am grateful to many people for this opportunity.

My father told me many years ago that if you feel you have something to offer, some talents, some tools, don't be selfish and waste them on yourself. Be willing to serve others. I have never forgotten that. I am genuinely honored to serve."

Hitt began his 24th year as the longest tenured coach in SFSC Panther Baseball history this past August. In his tenure as head baseball coach, Hitt has seen over 170 players move on to four-year schools and/or professional baseball. Hitt's expectations of the players are simple: "Dedicate yourself to being an outstanding young man and representative of SFSC daily, commit to academic accountability and graduation, and play the greatest game in the world as hard as you can play it each day you get the chance. The growth that occurs within this process has the opportunity to stay with you as you venture on in life."

In May 2020, Hitt was selected to be inducted into the National Junior College Athletic Association's Baseball Coaches Hall of Fame, and he will be inducted in May 2022. He has been inducted into two additional Halls of Fame — the Santa Fe College Hall of Fame, as

a member of the 1985 State Championship and National Tournament Team, and the Florida College System Activities Association (FCSAA) Hall of Fame. Hitt began his coaching career 34 years ago as an assistant coach at Sebring High School.

In the past 13 years, Hitt has completed terms as the NJCAA Coaches Association secretary, vice president, and served five years as the association's president which included six years as a member of the NJCAA National Team staff. Hitt is currently the FCSAA State Baseball Chairperson for Region 8 in Florida and served 16 years on the FCSAA State Baseball Committee.

"All of SFSC is honored to share in Coach Hitt's joy," said Dr. Thomas C. Leitzel, SFSC president. "He is a natural leader and contributes willingly to advance academics and athletics from his platform, locally, as a director of athletics and from his positions on national organizations. His professional passion is baseball. Coach Hitt has been and continues to be an influence on countless students who play baseball for the Panthers and others who participate in Panther athletics. Rick willingly shares his experience through his daily discharge of duties that shape the lives of current athletes who will become future leaders when they graduate."

The ABCA, founded in 1945, is the primary professional organization for baseball coaches at the amateur level. Its over 13,000 members represent all 50 states and 33 countries. Since its initial meeting of 27 college baseball coaches in June 1945, Association membership has broadened to include nine divisions: NCAA Division I, II, and III; NAIA; NJCAA; Pacific Association Division; High School; Youth; and Travel Baseball.

Lee Ann Womack in concert Saturday at SFSC

By **MARC VALERO**
STAFF WRITER

AVON PARK — Grammy Award-winning vocalist and songwriter Lee Ann Womack will be performing a stripped down/acoustic performance of her songs Saturday at the Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts at South Florida State College.

Tickets are still available for the 7 p.m. show that includes special guest Catie Offerman.

Womack won a Grammy Award in 2003 for Best Country Collaboration with Willie Nelson for "Mendocino County Line" and she has nine Grammy nominations.

She has received numerous awards from the Country Music Association and Academy of Country Music, including a CMA award for 2001 Female Vocalist of the Year.

Her crossover smash hit, "I Hope You Dance," was Billboard Magazine's 2001 Adult Contemporary Single of the Year.

Highlands News-Sun

spoke by phone recently with Womack, who was at her Nashville home preparing for her three tour stops in Florida, including SFSC.

Womack said she is very much looking forward to being in Florida.

Growing up in east Texas, she always wanted to sing and her dad worked in radio, Womack said. She listened to a lot of George Jones, Ray Price, Bob Wills, and Dolly Parton was a big influence.

Womack released her self-titled debut album in 1997 with its second single, "The Fool," making the top 5 of the Billboard Country Chart. She had two singles from her second album hit No. 2 on the country chart.

Womack's third album from 2000, "I Hope You Dance," became a career highlight with the title song becoming a huge crossover hit with its positive message, emotive vocals and stellar arrangement and production.

Womack's record label introduced her to the song.

"When I first heard it, I thought about my kids and it just made me think about all the things I wanted for them in life," Womack said. "I was a young mother at the time so it just struck a chord with me because of that and I figured it would probably with other people as well affect them the way it did me."

"Without being preachy, it was a good general way to share how I thought life should be lived."

Was she surprised when it became such a big hit?

Womack replied, "Hugely surprised. You never know. It takes a lot of things to make some things work and you never know what is going to work. As big a hit as it was, that was definitely a surprise to me."

Were there any song offerings that she passed on that she later regretted?

For recording, Womack said she always wanted the songs that nobody else wanted, mostly because she was such a traditional country artist and people weren't really recording that kind of



COURTESY PHOTO

Grammy Award-winning vocalist Lee Ann Womack will perform Saturday at South Florida State College.

stuff anymore. She said there weren't any songs that got away from her that she wished she had.

Due to the COVID pandemic, Womack hasn't played any shows in the past couple of years.

So now she is doing an acoustic show. She said it is too hard to do a big tour because there is too much to cancel if it doesn't work out.

She is very happy and a little nervous to be performing because she hasn't done it in a long time.

"I am so excited; Florida has always been one of my favorite places to play. I grew up in east Texas and Florida reminds me of that simply because the people there are so friendly and so relaxed and I love

that and so I am very excited," Womack said.

For ticket information, go online to culturalperformances@southflorida.edu or contact the South Florida State College Box Office at 863-784-7178. The Box Office hours are 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Monday-Friday and one hour prior to performances.

FLORIDA State College



PHOTO BY TOM STAIK

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis stopped in Bowling Green last week to announce a \$415,000 grant for South Florida State College to purchase a driving simulator for its Commercial Vehicle Driving Program in Avon Park.

Governor Touts Workforce Efforts In Hardee Visit

By TOM STAIK
Of The Herald-Advocate

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis touted the state's efforts to promote workforce development during a visit last Thursday (Jan. 20) to the Hardee County Campus of South Florida State College.

The campus served as backdrop for a press conference as the governor announced a \$415,000 grant for the college's Avon Park-based Commercial Vehicle Driver Program. The funds are earmarked for the purchase of a driving simulator machine.

With students from Hardee's lineman program holding "Truck Yeah" signs staged in front of a big rig and trailer from the Avon Park program as his backdrop, DeSantis emphasized efforts to make Florida the No. 1 state for workforce education in the national by 2030.

"Workforce education provides a pathway for Floridians to succeed, but also helps alleviate the damage being wrought by inflation and supply chain interruptions," said DeSantis. "We are facing supply chain shortages caused by bad federal policies and a lack of investment in workers across our country. In Florida, we are stepping up by providing support to skilled trades that are essential for a strong economy."

Hardee dairyman Joe Wright spoke of the need for more certified truck drivers during the press conference.

Southeast Milk Inc., a cooperative of Florida's dairy farmers, is suffering a shortage of local drivers, Wright said.

Current routes require approximately 160 drivers but only 130 drivers are currently employed, Wright said.

Average starting pay for drivers, Wright said, is \$65,000.

"We hire from all over, but our best success has been with drivers coming through the driving school at South Florida State College," Wright said.

The grant award was part of a larger pot of \$2.3

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million that was announced from projects across the state.

The funds are made available through the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Funding to support rapid training programs, spanning six to sixteen weeks, in the areas of CDL, logistics and healthcare.

In addition to SFSC's CDL program, the State College of Florida - Manatee/Sarasota received \$930,000; Manatee Technical College received \$550,000; and North Florida Technical College received \$100,000. Nursing programs at Florida Gateway College will receive \$135,000 and the College of the Florida Keys will receive \$150,000.

Henry Mack, senior chancellor of the Florida Department of Education overseeing the Division of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, was present for the press conference.

"We're seeing evidence that CTE graduates are earning the same median lifetime earning as baccalaureate degree earners," Mack said. "A case in point are the truck driver graduates of SFSC."

SFSC's Commercial Vehicle Driver Program is a four-week course that offers in-depth, hands-on truck driving experience and provides connections with future employers. Joe Burke, who was a truck driver for 36 years, is the program's coordinator and instructor.

The college accepts approximately 260 students into the program annually. There are 25 prospective students on a wait list for acceptance into the program, according to the school.

Following the press conference, the governor and his entourage stopped for lunch at Gloria's Restaurant in Bowling Green.