

Trent Ferguson, SFSC Student Commencement Speaker, Found His Niche in Radio

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

Trent Ferguson was born blind and was diagnosed with optic nerve hypoplasia. However, what may be deemed a disability for someone else fueled his desire for knowledge and launched his career in radio.

Ferguson will earn his Associate in Arts from South Florida State College (SFSC) during the College's Commencement ceremony on Tuesday, May 10 at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts on SFSC's Highlands Campus in Avon Park. In fact, he will be the graduation speaker during the 4:30 p.m. ceremony.

Upon graduation from SFSC, Ferguson plans to pursue a bachelor's degree in Mass Communications from the University of South Florida. Originally, from Avon Park, Ferguson graduated in 2017 from the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind (FSDB), a public school for pre-K and K-12 students in St. Augustine, Fla.

Ferguson currently works full-time and remotely from Highlands County as the assistant news director for Flagler Broadcasting, located in Bunnell, Fla. After earning his bachelor's degree, he would like to continue working in the radio industry.

"Radio's my dream career and a good fit," he said.

Additionally, he plays the drums for his church's praise band and with Highlands County's own California Toe Jam Band.

Ferguson began working for Flagler Broadcasting as a daily sports anchor in 2019. While he continues to anchor the sports each weekday morning, he also serves as assistant news director and produces commercials.

Ferguson began his radio career during his junior year in high school. The general manager for Flagler Broadcasting had invited students from the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind to attend the ribbon cutting of a new building in St. Augustine. During the event, Ferguson chatted with folks from the radio station and they were impressed with his knowledge of

radio.

In January 2016, the general manager asked Ferguson to record commercials about the dangers of texting and driving. Because they were so well done, Ferguson was then asked to cohost with a popular morning DJ for one day in February 2016. Eventually, Ferguson was recording a sports podcast called "Outta Sight Sports."

"The name of the show was inspired by a band that I played in while at FSDB," Ferguson said.

"The high school band is called 'Outta Sight.'"

In January 2019, the podcast was turned into an on-air Saturday show on WNZF, broadcast out of Bunnell. That led Ferguson to a morning sports anchor job, and he has continued on a trajectory with Flagler Broadcasting.

Ferguson came to SFSC at the suggestion of his aunt, Janie Ferguson, who worked in the College's Testing Center for many years.

"After I graduated from high school, she said I would love SFSC — it gets you ready for the university," he said. "She told me that I should take classes here and it has a great disabilities specialist — Charla Ellerker. Charla's a godsend and amazing. She helps me with what I need to take classes and with accommodations. My first class was Oral Communications with the great Lynn MacNeill in June 2018."

Ferguson doesn't let anything stop him in his pursuit of his goals.

"Being blind has been a blessing. Blindness is not a disability, but a way of life," Ferguson said. "My parents had the same expectations of me as they would for a sighted person — to be a successful person in society. And the school in St. Au-



Trent Ferguson (l) with Rich Carroll, news and sports director with radio station WNZF and co-host of Outta Sight Sports.

gustine had a huge impact on teaching me how to live on my own." Ferguson credits his grandparents

I'd like to give credit to him — Yoel Sanchez. Every time I've

for assisting him in his academic endeavors.

"My grandfather, Dean Ferguson, drives me to campus nearly every time I have a face-to-face class meeting or I need to take care of other business," he said. "And my other grandparents, Julie and T.J., help in this effort as well."

Ferguson has had to overcome obstacles in his academic career, occasionally.

"My screen reading software wouldn't work with some textbooks. Instead of giving up, I have a human reader who's assisted me.

taken a course, he's there to read my exams to me and read class assignments and assures me that they're visually acceptable and meet the instructor's requirements. He helps me to circumvent the technology barrier. My screen reader works 95% of the time, but technology sometimes doesn't work," he said.

When asked how SFSC has helped him in his life, Ferguson said, "Big time."

"I credit my professors for being more than willing to grant me accommodations, such as giving me extended time on classwork," he added. "And Charla Ellerker helps me out. SFSC has given me the opportunity to learn new things. I've developed lifelong friendships with my instructors. It's a relaxing place for me. I've had the honor of getting to know professors, and their willingness to accommodate me has been comforting."

Deborah Bell Latter is the coordinator of internal communication at South Florida State College and can be reached at 863-784-7251 or Deborah.Latter@southflorida.edu

SFSC Commencement May 10

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

SFSC will celebrate spring Commencement with two ceremonies on Tuesday, May 10. The first ceremony is at 4:30 p.m. and the second is at 7:30 p.m. Both ceremonies will be held in the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts on the SFSC Highlands Campus in Avon Park.

The 4:30 p.m. ceremony features students who are earning their Associate in Arts or State of Florida High School Diploma. Trent Ferguson, who earns his Associate in Arts, will be the student Commencement speaker at this ceremony.

The 7:30 p.m. ceremony features students who are earning their Bachelor of Applied Science in Supervision and Management

(BAS-SM), Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education (BSEE), Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), Associate in Science (AS), or Career and College Credit Certificate.

Shelby Spencer, who earns her Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education (BSEE), will be the student commencement speaker at this ceremony.

Live online streaming, accessed by clicking a website banner at southflorida.edu, will allow friends and relatives to see everything from the processional to the last graduate crossing the stage. The stream begins on May 10 at 4:30 and 7:30 p.m. EDT.

Approximately 440 students will have met the SFSC requirements by spring 2022 Commencement. Of these, 21 will receive their BAS-SM, 10 receive their

BSN, 12 receive their BSEE, 197 receive their AA, 93 receive their AS, 10 receive their State of Florida High School Diploma, and 97 receive the Career and College Credit Certificate. Students participating in the Commencement ceremonies will total 286.

Mace bearer and chief marshal for this year's ceremony is Tom Bush, and marshals are Michele Macbeth, Joan Briand, Jennifer Groves, Kathleen Cappel, Rob Hampton, Ricardo Pantoja, Dr. Maday Leon, Garrett Lee, Cindy Kinser, Tina Stetson, Kendra Wellnitz, Mlisa Manning, Andy Polk, Michael Pate, Richard Hitt, and Dr. Minto Patel.

The Commencement rehearsal takes place Tuesday, May 10, at 10 a.m., in the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts on the SFSC Highlands Campus.



COURTESY PHOTOS/SFSC

Shelby Spencer (left) and Dr. Maday Leon, lead Instructor of SFSC Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education program

Like Mother, Like Daughter Hardee High Grad Follows Mom's Footsteps To Become Teacher

By DEBORAH BELL LATTER

Special to The Herald-Advocate

Shelby Spencer has wanted to be a teacher since she was a child.

On Tuesday, May 10, she will be the student speaker during South Florida State College's (SFSC) 7:30 p.m. spring Commencement ceremony at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts on the Highlands Campus in Avon Park.

At the same time, her dream becomes a reality when she is conferred her Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education (BSEE).

A native of Hardee County, Spencer graduated from Hardee Senior High School in 2019 and earned her Associate in Arts from SFSC through the College's dual enrollment program.

"It's been an exciting journey," Spencer said. "I want to be an educator because I want to be a positive role model in students' lives. I've seen the impact on students who are not cared

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for or don't have much parental support in their lives. I'm responsible, trustworthy, dependable, and loving. I feel those attributes will make me a great educator, and I'm passionate about kids."

Spencer's greatest inspiration for entering the teaching profession is her mother, Lisa. She has been a teacher for 27 years and, currently, teaches second grade at North Wauchula Elementary School.

"Through seeing her interactions with her students, the way she is able to love them when they're down, or just need support, that's what really inspires me," Spencer said. "She doesn't just show up every day to teach. Although the main goal of a teacher is to teach students, it's the loving, passionate relationship that my mom has with her students that truly inspires me."

Her aunt also teaches third grade at Zolfo Springs Elementary School. Recently, the students took the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) test. Spencer's aunt and her coworkers decided they wanted to encourage their students by dressing up as rock stars.

"They came to school and would shout, 'Let's rock on. Let's rock the FSA!' in front of the school," Spencer said. "It was to motivate and support the students. The kids were excited and would respond, 'Rock on!' Things like that really make me want to be an educator."

Although Spencer says that her studies in the BSEE program have been a highlight in her life, she has been facing a personal challenge, along with her family. While preparing to graduate from high school in 2019, her mother was diagnosed with cancer and continues to battle the disease.

"Your senior year in high school is supposed to be your most exciting time," Spencer said. "But that's been the

hardest part of my life — trying to be strong for my mom. It's hard to always be strong, but my family and I have faith in God for protection and total healing over her life."

Spencer considers her mother her best friend and her role model.

"When I start teaching, I want my mom to be there and help me decorate my classroom," she said. "That's what I dreamed of. I can't wait for that day to come."

In the meantime, life after the BSEE program is falling into place for Spencer. Although her most recent internship has been teaching fourth grade, she's been offered teaching jobs and is leaning toward a position as a kindergarten teacher.

"I remember my kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Carlton at Wauchula Elementary School," Spencer said. "Because of her, every day at school was such a joy, and I want to do that for my kindergarten students — to be their first teacher and make a profound impact on their education. As students come to class for the first time, you don't know what their background is, what their home life is like, or if they've been to preschool. I want to be the teacher that can make that first impact and be that proactive teacher who makes them want to enjoy school and learning from kindergarten all the way to 12th grade."

Spencer's also applied to begin a master's degree at Florida Gulf Coast University with a focus in Curriculum

and Instruction.

"I want to keep going in education," she said. "My goal is to, eventually, get my doctorate. After teaching elementary school for several years, I'd like to be a college professor in an Education program. I'd love to become an instructor and to inspire

each other and they learn from one another," Spencer said. "I noticed that through using Kagan, students' test scores are usually higher. On weeks I didn't implement as much Kagan into the classroom, the test scores were average. But you can tell the collaboration really increases

science class," Spencer said. "In elementary schools, students often participate in science fairs. In his class, we created science fair projects to help us teach students by first experiencing the process ourselves."

The BSEE program affords students the opportunity to earn a Reading endorsement.

"Some of the most impactful courses that I had were with Dr. Leon," Spencer said. "She gave us a plethora of reading strategies. The reading strategies that I love to implement the most are Reader's Theaters and Choral Readings." Reader's Theater engages children in oral reading through reading parts in scripts. Choral reading is reading aloud in unison with a whole class or a group of students to build fluency and self-confidence.

Beyond her studies within the BSEE program, Spencer found support and a new best friend.

"My professors weren't just there to teach," she said, "they would talk to

me about things that were going on personally, especially, Dr. Leon. She has not just been a teacher, she's been a personal savior in this instance. She let me come into her office to talk with her. She has stayed with me after class and before class. When you know someone, you can tell if they're having an off day, and she could tell when I was having an off day in class. She would stay with me after class and say, 'How's your mom? How are you doing? Is there anything I can do to help? I'm praying for you.'"

As part of a cohort program

— one in which a group of students enter a program together and remain together until its completion — Spencer found a College family.

"I met one of my best friends in my program, Rosaura Guido. She's graduating from the BSEE program as well. Ever since the first class we had in the program, we instantly connected and we think so much alike."

In fact, Spencer and Guido grew up in Hardee County and never met until they became students in the program. Spencer will be celebrating Commencement with her other best friend, her sister-in-law Josie Spencer, who graduates from the Associate in Science in Nursing program.

"Shelby will be a fantastic teacher," said Dr. Leon. "The goal of the BSEE program is to positively impact our school districts by preparing effective educators who create a positive learning environment for all students. The program's emphasis is on helping student teachers implement collaboration and develop a classroom management plan based on the student-teacher relationship. The quality of our graduates is evident, because all of them have received more than one job offer during their final internship."

Throughout the program, BSEE faculty inspire our students to work hard and implement inclusive strategies which accommodate English Language Learners, struggling readers, and Exceptional Student Education (ESE) students."

Spencer says her journey now will be to strive to make every day enjoyable.

"I strive to live everyday as if it's my last," Spencer said. "I do everything I can to make life enjoyable. I love adventure and trying new things. I love to hang out with my family and friends. They are my rock."



Spencer engaged her kindergarten students in a reading project during her fall 2021 Kindergarten Internship.

other students to become teachers, just like my professors at SFSC have done for me and my classmates."

Spencer has learned various teaching strategies from Dr. Maday Leon, leader instructor for the SFSC BSEE program, and from Dr. Jerry Wright, her BSEE professor and the assistant principal at Woodlawn Elementary School. She mentioned using the Kagan Cooperative Learning Structure, a learning model in which every student becomes actively involved in instruction.

"It makes learning collaborative, so students talk to

the students' learning overall."

She also enjoyed classes that involved English Language Learnings (ELL). Taught by Michelle Macbeth, SFSC Spanish instructor, BSEE students learned strategies on how to support children who come into the classroom and know no English, little English, or are on the verge of becoming English proficient. Through Macbeth's class, the BSEE students were able to obtain their English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) endorsement.

"I also loved Dr. Wright's



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Wednesday, May 11, 2022

SECTION B

SFSC Coaches recognize athletes and fans at annual awards ceremony

Special to the Highlands News-Sun

AVON PARK – South Florida State College's Athletics Department wrapped up its 2021-22 season Tuesday evening by honoring the student athletes who lent their talents to the Cross Country, Volleyball, Baseball, and Softball teams and by recognizing several outstanding fans.

SFSC President Dr.

Thomas Leitzel opened the awards ceremony in the SFSC University Center by thanking the devoted fans, the coaching staff, and the student athletes.

"I just want to say thank you for everything you do," Dr. Leitzel told the Panther athletes. "It's very important for me to recognize that first you are students because you are student athletes. And it means a lot. The

academic recognition that you bring to us is important. I look forward to all the returning students, and to the ones who graduate — we wish you well."

Coach Hitt attributed the success of SFSC's athletic teams to the tremendous amount of support they receive from College staff, their devoted fans, and the

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COURTESY/SFSC

Brady Markham, a right-handed pitcher and infielder for the Panther Baseball team, was recognized as SFSC's Male Scholastic Athlete of the Year.



COURTESY/SFSC

Abigale Ayers, an infielder for Lady Panthers Softball team, was distinguished as SFSC's Female Scholastic Athlete of the Year.



COURTESY/SFSC

Former Sebring Blue Streak Blayne Huter received a Panther Baseball Pitching Leadership certificate.



COURTESY/SFSC

Former Lake Placid Green Dragon Francesca Chillemi was honored as the Cross Country team's Most Valuable Runner.

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AWARDS

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community.

"If you went up in a plane or helicopter, and you dropped this massive net over our community, you would encompass a great many things," Hitt said. "There are people in every group, every business, every office, and every facet of this College who do something to support our athletic program. It is unbelievable, and it starts at the top."

Freshmen and sophomore players from the College's four athletic

teams received plaques for their participation in their sports. Coaches for the Cross Country and Baseball teams recognized several of their athletes for outstanding accomplishments during the season.

Cross Country Coach Christi Bobo presented the Most Resilient Runner award to Megan O'Sullivan and named Francesca Chillemi the team's Most Valuable Runner.

Coach Hitt gave the Baseball team's Great Catch Award to Deven Tedders. Pitching Leadership Awards were presented to Alex

Burden, Blayne Huter, and Bryce Shaffer. Offensive Leadership Awards went to Pedro Moreno, Nico Saladino, and Brylan West. Hitt also announced that West, a freshman who played outfield and first base, will receive an athletic scholarship to SFSC when he returns for his sophomore year.

Brady Markham and Abigale Ayers were recognized as the Male and Female Scholastic Athletes of the Year. Markham, a sophomore from Okeechobee, was a right-handed pitcher and played infield for the Panther Baseball

team. Ayers, a sophomore from New Port Richey, played infield for the Lady Panthers Softball team.

Dr. Deborah Fuschetti, SFSC's retired registrar, and Lena Phelps, chair of SFSC's Library Services, were recognized as SFSC Panther Athletic Super Fans. Phelps also received the Panther of the Year Award for 2021-22 for her outstanding contributions to Panther Athletics.

For more information about SFSC's athletic teams, visit southflorida.edu/community/athletics.

Dental Hygiene student awarded \$1,000 Heartland Dental Scholarship

Special to Highlands News-Sun

FROM SOUTH FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE

AVON PARK — South Florida State College (SFSC) student, Maria Tilado, has been awarded a \$1,000 scholarship from Heartland Dental.

Tilado is a first-year Dental Hygiene student, who plans to graduate from SFSC in May 2023. She lives in Cape Coral, Florida and travels approximately two hours one way to attend classes at the College.

“This scholarship means a lot to me, because I really need the support,” Tilado said. “The Dental Hygiene program is full-time, so it’s difficult to work. It would even be difficult to have a job on the weekend, because of all the homework and projects you do for class. I use my Saturdays and Sundays for that. This scholarship will help me with my books, food, and gasoline.”

Students who are awarded scholarships from Heartland Dental must be currently enrolled in an educational institution’s Dental Hygiene program and seeking an associate degree in Dental Hygiene. The scholarship is to be used in the semester following the award. The student must have a cumulative GPA of 3.2 or higher and they must commit to completing an externship at a Heartland Dental support office during their winter or spring break from their program.

Tilado will be eligible to complete her externship with Heartland Dental during SFSC’s winter break in December 2022, when she will be able to shadow their hygienists and team members.



COURTESY PHOTO/SFSC

Maria Tilado, scholarship winner.

SFSC offers a two-year Associate in Science degree in Dental Hygiene and an 11-month Dental Assistant Career Certificate. For more information about SFSC Dental Education programs, contact Danielle Ochoa, Health Sciences advisor, at 863-784-7027 or by email at healthsciences@southflorida.edu.

About Heartland Dental
Heartland Dental is the nation’s largest dental support organization providing non-clinical, administrative support services. What started from the entrepreneurial spirit of Rick Workman, DMD, with his single dental practice, has evolved into affiliating with over 2,300 doctors in over 1,600 locations across 38 states. The company is majority owned by KKR, a leading global investment firm. For additional information, please visit heartland.com. Follow us on LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

SFSC recognized for excellence on awards day

Special to Highlands News-Sun
COURTESY SFSC

AVON PARK — South Florida State College (SFSC) students were honored for academic excellence and community service during the college's Annual Student Awards Ceremony on the SFSC Highlands Campus in Avon Park on May 6. Each year, faculty honor students who exhibit talent and exemplary quality that go beyond academic standards.

SFSC student Trent Ferguson was honored with the 2021-22 Joseph E. Johnston/Bette L. McDearman Student Services Award for exhibiting great ethics and character, exceptional academic achievement, and for his contribution to the college and community. Ferguson graduated from SFSC on Tuesday, May 10 and was student Commencement speaker. He plans to pursue a bachelor's degree in mass communications from the University of South Florida. He holds several jobs in radio and plays drums with a well-known Highlands County band. Blind since birth, he does not let

his blindness stop him from accomplishing his goals.

Students who received awards and recognition for participation in the following academic programs are:

Healthcare Management – Taylor McIntyre; Dental Hygiene – Jahirel Gomez; RN to BSN – Jace Masong; Radiography – Rebecca Nadaskay; EMS/Paramedic – Kaley Piggott; Phlebotomy – Joselyn Ramos; Medical Assisting – Breanna Whitt; Mechatronics – Nicholas Blair; Office Education – Sandraeya Butler; Culinary Arts – Devin Giove; HVAC – Aiden Hagarty; Computer Programming

– Nathaniel Lethbridge; Accounting – Erik Ontiveros; Education – Ericka Berthiaume; Economics – Alejandro Cruz-Balleza; Political Science – Janelle Hamilton; American History – Rosemarie Klein; Psychology – Brisa Luevano; Freshman English I – Jordan Vazquez; Theater Appreciation – Jordan Vazquez; Speech – Lisa Klein; Calculus I – Andrew Blackwelder Goitia; Calculus II – Noah Roth; Chemistry – Syed Qadri; General Biology – Mya St. Louis.

For more information about South Florida State College and its programs, visit southflorida.edu.



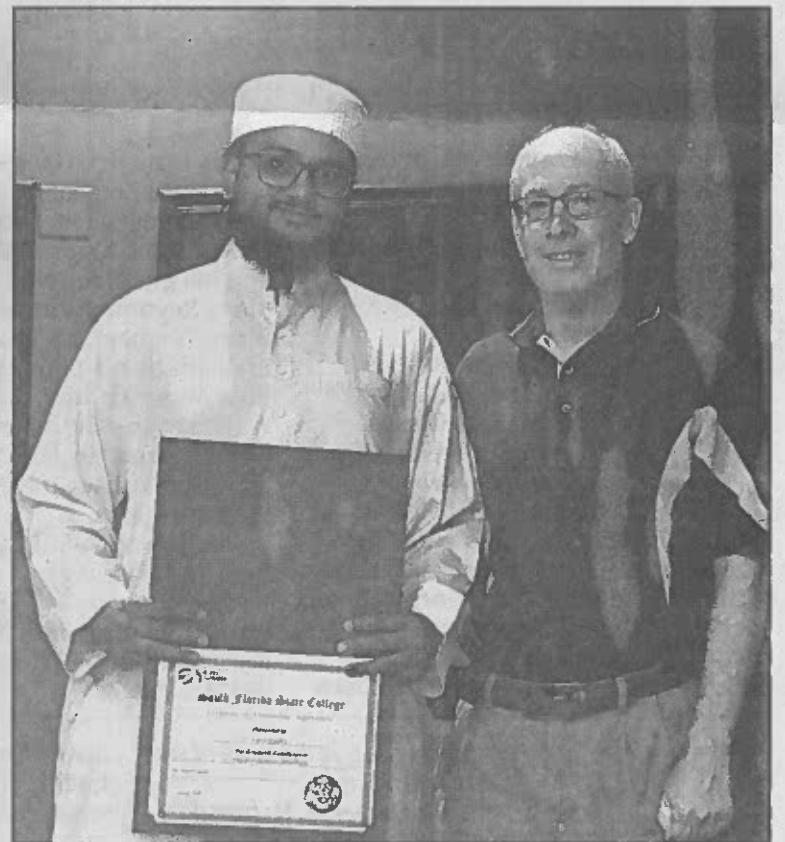
COURTESY PHOTO

Trent Ferguson (left) was honored with the Joseph E. Johnston/Dr. Bette L. McDearman Award. He is shown with Dr. Mark Bukowski, dean of student services.



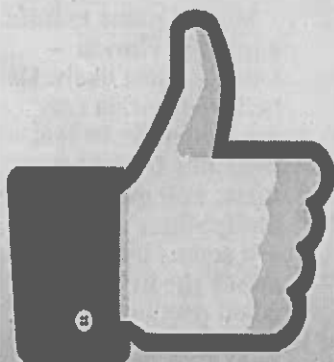
COURTESY PHOTO

Janelle Hamilton (left) was honored as the Outstanding Student of the Year in Political Science by her professor, Dr. Marcy Everest (not pictured). Dr. James Hawker (right), dean of arts and sciences, presented the certificate.



COURTESY PHOTO

Syed Qadri (left) was honored as the Outstanding Student of the Year in Chemistry by his professor, Dr. Kate Calvin (not pictured). Dr. James Hawker, dean of arts and sciences, presented the certificate.



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COURTESY PHOTO

Hill Griffin (center), son of the late Ben Hill Griffin III, accepted the SFSC Foundation Legacy Award on behalf of his father. Pictured from left, Tres Stephenson, SFSC Foundation Board of Directors president; Hill Griffin; and Jamie Bateman, SFSC director of institutional advancement.

Ben Hill Griffin III Inducted Into SFSC Foundation Legacy Society

By **DEBORAH BELL LATTER**

Special To The Herald-Advocate

During the South Florida State College (SFSC) Foundation Legacy Showcase and Fundraiser on Saturday, May 7, Ben Hill Griffin III was posthumously inducted into the 2022 Legacy Society for his service to the Foundation and to the College. Jamie Bateman, SFSC executive director of institutional advancement made the presentation.

"The Foundation Board chose to honor Ben Hill Griffin III, because he and his family have had a long history of support for SFSC," Bateman said. "Since the mid-1980s, what started with Mr. Griffin Jr., Ben Hill Griffin III continued the family's legacy of giving to colleges in support of higher education. Mr. Griffin believed in helping young people and knew the importance of having a college degree and how it could impact a young person's life for the better. Because of their history of support, the Foundation Board felt that this year's Legacy Award should go to someone who has made a difference in the lives of so many."

This is the fourth year that such an honor has taken place. Bill and Lisa Jarrett were inducted into The Legacy Society in 2021, Joan Hartt was inducted in 2020, and Joe Jr. and Gloria Davis were inducted in 2019.

"Congratulations to the Griffin family on Ben Hill Griffin III's induction into the SFSC Foundation's Legacy Society," said John

Barben of Robert J. Barben, Inc. and Barben Fruit Company. "The Griffin family has a legacy of giving to postsecondary education in Florida. Ben Hill Griffin Jr. gave to the University of Florida, mainly through athletics. We all know that the stadium is named after him. Ben Hill Griffin III, as CEO of Alico, gave the land where Florida Gulf Coast University now sits.

"Right here, with South Florida State College, he has endowed over 30 scholarships in the last five years. Just recently, I was at a scholarship recognition reception where students talked about what those scholarships meant to them. Some of those students were first time, young college students. Others were returning parents who wanted to make a difference for their families."

Marlene Gonsales, who plans to graduate from the SFSC Bachelor of Applied Science in Supervision and Management (BAS-SM) in spring 2023, was awarded a \$1,000 Ben Hill Griffin Jr. General Endowed Scholarship last fall through the SFSC Foundation. Gonsales earned her Associate in Arts from SFSC in May 2021. She is from Lake Placid and works part-time at Publix supermarket.

Upon earning her BAS, Gonsales would like to work at the Publix Corporate Office in Lakeland.

"Receiving the Ben Hill Griffin Jr. Endowed Scholarship has definitely relieved the financial stress that comes with attending college," she said. "Before the

scholarship, my main concern was having to hold off on getting my degree, but now I'm one step closer to achieving my goal of getting my bachelor's degree."

The Ben Hill Griffin Jr. General Endowed Scholarship gives preference to students who are enrolled full time in any of these bachelor's degree programs at SFSC: Bachelor of Applied Science in Supervision and Management, Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education, or Bachelor of Science in Nursing. It is awarded to students from Highlands, Hardee, or DeSoto Counties.

"Supporting higher education was important to my dad," said Hill Griffin, Ben Hill Griffin III's son. "He realized how fortunate that he was. He grew up in a family that could afford to go to college. It was rewarding for him to give back and support young people who were pursuing a career and a better life for themselves and their families.

"My dad would say that a lot of people are deserving of this award," he added. "I don't think that it ever crossed his mind that he would receive an award for giving. It was something that he was taught and came natural to him. I know that he would appreciate it. It was a part of who he was."

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@south-florida.edu.



COURTESY PHOTO/SFSC

The 2022 Dental Hygiene graduates (from left): Megan Anderson, Denise Garza, Jahirel M. Gomez, Vanessa Rodriguez, Deanna Sheikha, Jennifer Lopez, Keijhandra Singh-Truitt, and Jhoelle Tingle.

Dental Hygiene graduates honored with pinning ceremony

Special to Highlands News-Sun

FROM SOUTH FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE

AVON PARK — South Florida State College (SFSC) honored graduates of its Dental Hygiene program in a traditional pinning ceremony in the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts on the Highlands Campus in Avon Park on Friday, May 6. The graduates had just completed their Associate in Science in Dental Hygiene.

Receiving their pins were Megan Anderson, Denise Garza, Jahirel M. Gomez, Jennifer Lopez, Vanessa Rodriguez, Deanna Sheikha, Keijhandra Singh-Truitt, and Jhoelle Tingle.

Jennifer Lopez, 2022 class president, addressed her fellow graduates: “This pinning shows that each one of us is capable of accomplishing our goals when we commit ourselves to them.

Anything is possible when we put our minds to it. Dental Hygiene Class of 2022, we are champions, and in the words of Muhammad Ali, ‘Champions aren’t made in gyms. Champions are made from something they have deep inside them— a desire, a dream, a vision. They have to have the skill, and the will. But the will must be stronger than the skill.’”

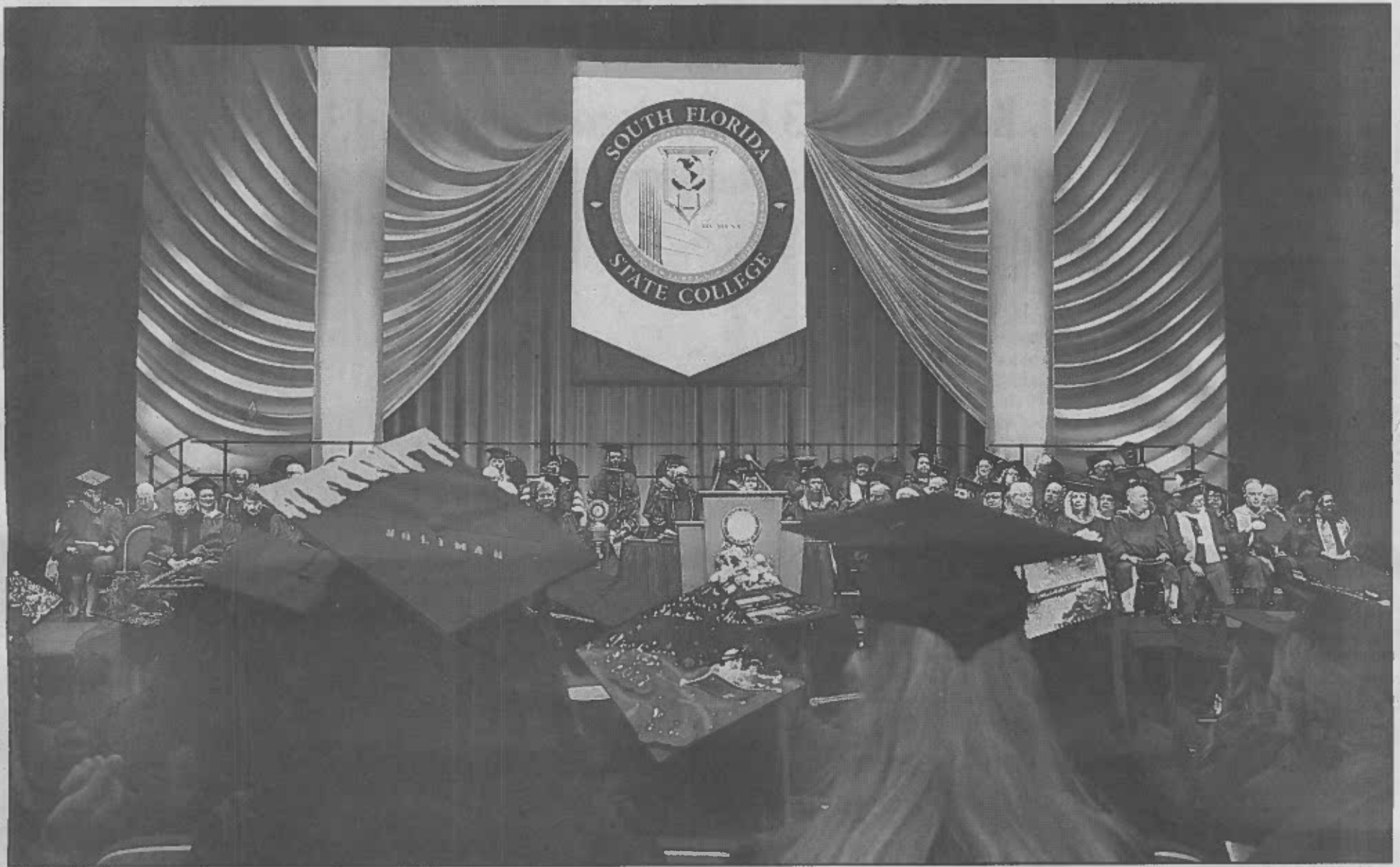
Graduates were presented their dental hygiene pins by Dr. Deborah Milliken, chair of SFSC’s Dental Education program.

During the ceremony, students and faculty paid homage to Darlene Saccuzzo, professor of Dental Education, in preparation for her retirement in June 2022. “When I think of Professor Saccuzzo, one word comes to mind — excellence,” said Dr. Michele Heston, dean of health sciences.

“For some, excellence represents the impossible dream. However, not so for her. She continually instilled in her students the desire to strive and do better, to become the very best version of themselves whether in the clinic or the classroom. She radiated caring, professionalism, and compassion.”

Upon completing the Dental Hygiene program, graduates become dental hygienists by passing the National Dental Hygiene Board Examination and the Florida State Clinical Licensure Examination. They can, then, work alongside a dentist as a member of a dental health care team.

For more information about SFSC’s Associate in Science in Dental Hygiene program, call Danielle Ochoa, Health Sciences advisor at 863-784-7027 or email healthsciences@south-florida.edu.



COURTESY/SFSC

The SFSC Commencement stage for the 2020-21 academic year.

SFSC Spring Commencement closes out 2021-22 academic year

SFSC Spring Commencement closes out 2021-22 academic year

By Special to Highlands News-Sun
COURTESY OF SOUTH FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE

AVON PARK — South Florida State College (SFSC) marked the end of the 2021-22 academic year with its spring Commencement held in two ceremonies on Tuesday, May 10, in the SFSC Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts on the Highlands Campus in Avon Park.

During the 4:30 p.m. ceremony, SFSC honored the recipients of the Associate in Arts and State of Florida High School Diploma.

Honored during the 7:30 p.m. ceremony were students who earned their Bachelor of Applied Science in Supervision and Management (BAS-SM), Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education (BSEE), Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), Associate in Science (AS), and Career and College Credit certificates.

Opening the ceremonies, Tami Cullens, chair of the SFSC

District Board of Trustees, told the graduates, "Class of 2022, tonight you will become part of the greater South Florida State College family, an affiliation we hope brings joy throughout your lives. Tomorrow, you are a brighter light to those around you, sharing your knowledge and making a difference in our world."

In his presentation to the graduates during the 4:30 p.m. ceremony, Trent Ferguson, who earned his Associate in Arts and holds a multitude of jobs in the radio industry, said, "I'm totally blind due to an eye condition called optic nerve hypoplasia and attended the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind in St. Augustine. Learning new information has so many benefits. Knowledge cannot be taken from you. Once it's in your brain, it's there to stay. You can use your knowledge to help others learn and grow. You become well-versed and more confident. Always be willing to step out of your comfort zone and make knowledge your superpower. I wish you

a lifetime of happiness, good health, and success."

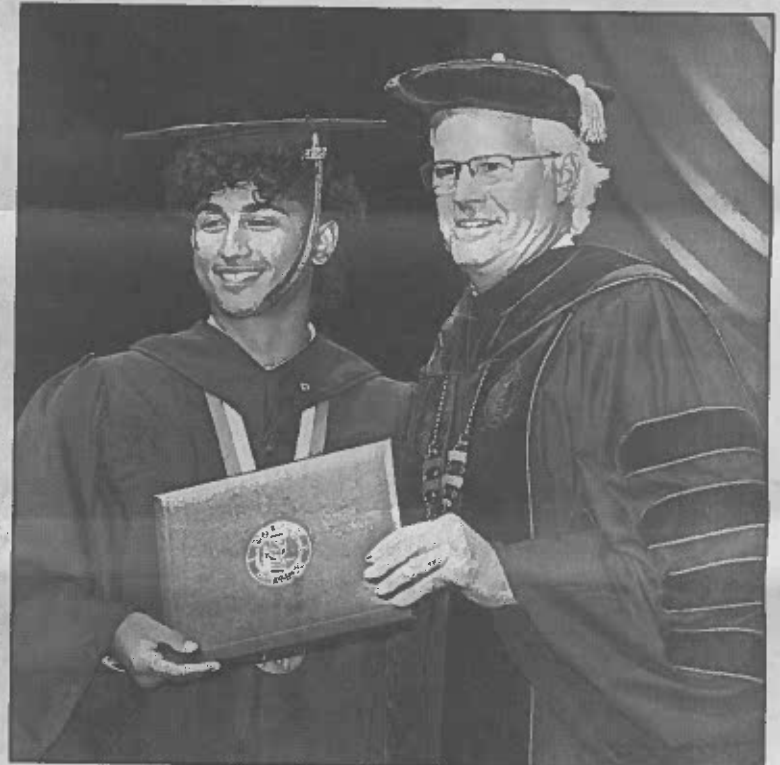
The 7:30 p.m. ceremony featured Shelby Spencer, who earned her Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education (BSEE) and anticipates becoming a kindergarten teacher. "I encourage you to always have a positive attitude no matter the situation," she said to the graduates. "Always look on the bright side and keep faith. Don't ever give up or have a negative outlook on your life. The path can get rocky, but I encourage you to be in constant prayer and always think positive."

"In preparation for becoming an elementary school teacher, I've been researching how I'd like to decorate my classroom. I found this quote about attitude: 'A great attitude becomes a great day, which becomes a great month, which becomes a great year, which becomes a great life!' Start your day with a positive attitude and your life will be richer for it."

Dr. Thomas C. Leitzel, SFSC president, acknowledged the upcoming retirement of Darlene Saccuzzo, professor of Dental Education, who was recognized for 15 years of excellence in scholarly contributions to students and the College.

Approximately 440 students met the SFSC requirements by spring 2022 Commencement. Of these, 21 received their BAS-SM, 10 received their BSN, 12 received their BSEE, 197 received their AA, 93 received their AS, 10 received their State of Florida High School Diploma, and 97 received the Career and College Credit certificates. Students participating in the Commencement ceremonies totaled 286.

Mace bearer and chief marshal for this year's ceremony was Tom Bush, and marshals were Michele Macbeth, Joan Briand, Jennifer Groves, Kathleen Cappo, Rob Hampton, Ricardo Pantoja, Dr. Maday Leon, Garrett Lee, Cindy Kinser, Tina Stetson, Kendra Wellnitz, Mlisa Manning, Andy Polk, Michael Pate, Richard Hitt, and Dr. Mintoo Patel.



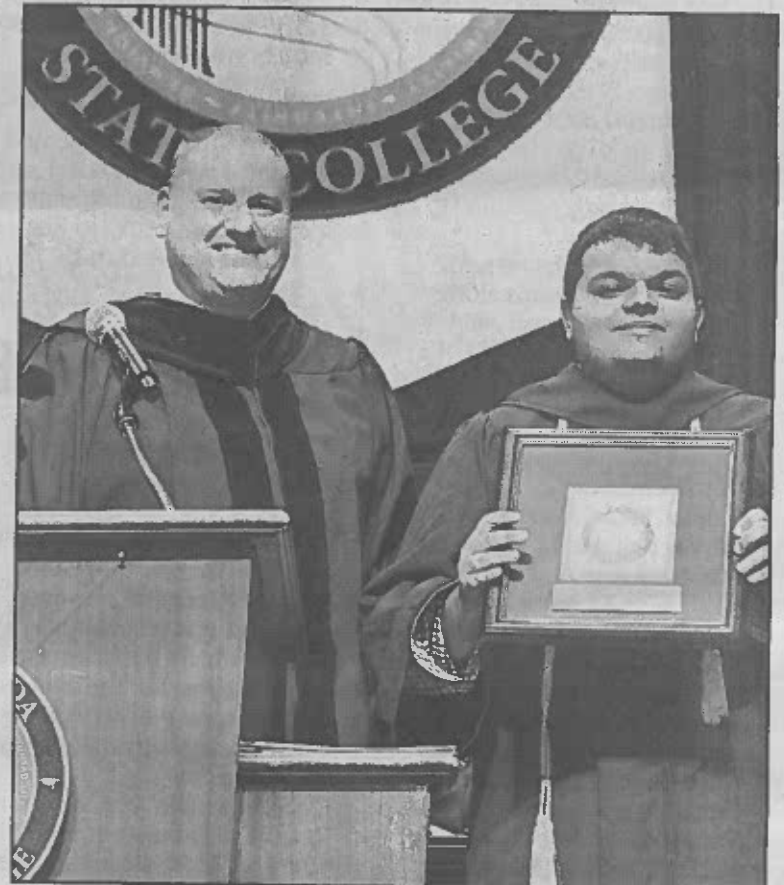
COURTESY/SFSC

Dr. Thomas C. Leitzel (right), SFSC president, presents a diploma to a new graduate.



COURTESY/SFSC

Dr. Mark Bukowski, dean of students, presents Shelby Spencer, student commencement speaker for the 7:30 p.m. ceremony, with a plaque of appreciation.



COURTESY/SFSC

From left: Dr. Mark Bukowski, dean of students, presents Trent Ferguson, student commencement speaker for the 4:30 p.m. ceremony, with a plaque of appreciation.

SFSC Automotive Service Technology program receives ASE accreditation



COURTESY/SFSC

Phil Rizzo (right) instructs students in his Automotive Service Technology class at the SFSC DeSoto Campus in Arcadia.

SPECIAL TO THE HIGHLANDS
NEWS-SUN

AVON PARK — South Florida State College's (SFSC) Automotive Service Technology program at its DeSoto Campus in Arcadia recently received continued accreditation to 2027 through the ASE Education Foundation.

The ASE Education Foundation is a non-profit organization that evaluates and accredits entry-level automotive technology education

programs against standards developed by the automotive service industry.

Accreditation through ASE Education Foundation signifies that a program meets the highest industry standards and speaks to the quality of the programs' faculty, curriculum, and overall operations. For local employers, it ensures a pool of highly trained entry-level technicians, whose education has been aligned with those industry standards.

According to the ASE Education Foundation, accreditation is a five-step process in evaluating a college's automotive service program, its structure, processes, resources, materials, and mission.

"Reaccreditation with ASE Education Foundation takes place every five years," said Phil Rizzo, SFSC professor of Automotive Service Technology at the DeSoto Campus. "At SFSC, my program advisory committee and I do a self-review first. We, then,

send it to ASE Education Foundation and they review it. They choose an evaluator to do a one-day, onsite evaluation along with two evaluators from our community. In this instance, they came from DeSoto Auto Mall in Arcadia and North Side Shell in Arcadia."

"Shop and student safety are most important in the evaluation," Rizzo said. "They also look at curriculum and tasks. Ours are identical to the

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state framework. And they check to see that shop tools and equipment are current."

SFSC offers an

18-month Automotive Service Technology Career Certificate and a 12-month Automotive Collision Technology Technician Career Certificate. For information about these programs, visit the SFSC website at southflorida.edu.

edu or call the Advising and Counseling Office at 863-784-7131. For information about the Automotive Service Technology program at the SFSC DeSoto Campus, contact Rizzo at 863-784-7048 or phil.rizzo@southflorida.edu.



Dr. Deborah Milliken



Kathleen Cappel



Dr. Daniel Sanches



Peggy Sueppel

Four SFSC Faculty Appointed Endowed Chairs

By DEBORAH BELL
LATTER

Special To The Herald-Advocate

Colleges and universities honor and encourage faculty who go beyond the requirements of the classroom. To that end, four SFSC faculty have been appointed as endowed chairs in their respective disciplines with funds donated through the South Florida State College (SFSC) Foundation.

Dr. Deborah Milliken, chair of dental education, was appointed as the Highlands County Health Facilities Authority (HCHFA) Endowed Chair in Dental Education, and Kathleen Cappel, nursing professor, was appointed as the HCHFA Endowed Chair in Nursing Education. The Norm and Laurie Stephens Endowed Teaching Chair went to Dr. Daniel Sanches, chair of natural sciences and biology instructor, and Peggy Sueppel, economics professor.

Faculty members appointed as teaching chairs are awarded \$5,000 per year for two years, with half going toward equipment, professional development, or to attend a conference related to the faculty member's discipline of study. The other half is a salary stipend.

Dr. Milliken plans to use part of the award to purchase Tal-Eval software for Dental Hygiene student assessment.

"It is fairly simple for faculty to use and easy for students to follow their progress and understand where improvements are needed in their performance," Dr. Milliken said. Part of the award will be used toward recertification coursework to administer and teach nitrous oxide sedation and coursework on advances in the diagnosis and treatment of pathologies.

Carrying forward her training as a nurse coach, Cappel plans to continue teaching holistic care for nurses.

"I would like to expand upon my role to enhance students' learning to care for themselves," she said. "Student nurses are at high risk for anxiety and practicing nurses are at high risk of burn out from the constant demands on them, especially during a global pandemic. My goal is to teach self-care to decrease stress and help the students in their roles as practitioners to help their patients decrease the stress in their lives during illnesses."

Cappel would also like to create continuing education for nurses in the community and apply these self-care techniques. Further, she would like to enable SFSC

Nursing faculty involvement in American Holistic Nurses Association (AHNA) conferences, so they can further teach students holistic care.

Dr. Sanches said that earlier in this academic year, five students participated in courses allowing them to learn cell culturing, cell assays, and cell image analyses.

"The project is beneficial to students seeking our biology, chemistry, and pre-professional pathways," he said. "It will allow them to develop their skills and apply their concepts to the actual life routine in a biomedical science lab. Through this grant, more students will be able to get involved in this project."

Sueppel proposed purchasing a tablet and necessary software that would allow

her to draw on an uploaded image that could be shown in real time to an online student and record the drawings as they are being done.

"It allows a student to receive real-time help with problems and the production of additional videos covering more complex concepts," she said. "Having this technology can potentially result in more students asking for help online. Currently, verbally describing the procedures has not always resulted in success and can be frustrating for the student. It also gives me, as the instructor, a way to more effectively reach out to students who are struggling."

Recipients for endowed teaching chairs at SFSC are chosen by a selection committee, with advice and counsel from College faculty.

Selections are confirmed by Dr. Thomas C. Leitzel, SFSC president.

The idea of endowed teaching chairs at state and community colleges came from research chairs at universities. At SFSC, the Endowed Chair program rewards faculty who hold the belief that the student must come first. The award can be used to fund professional development activities that ultimately enhance student learning and incorporate classroom projects or activities above and beyond what is usually offered in a course

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 PHOTOS/SFSC

Receiving their paramedic certificates were: (from l) Jacob Keener, James Simpson, Carlos Rivera, Roberto Morales Jr, Desmond Coleman, Chastity Bonney, Terry Armstrong, and Alan Akouka.



Receiving their certification from the Firefighter Minimum Standards program were (from l) Jorge Santiago, Clayton Johnson, Rafael Ramos, Michael Bacevic, Zachary Boyette, Jenna Levine, Rebecca Oser, Ana Saldana; and (back row) Kyle Cooper.

SFSC Fire, Paramedic Programs Hold Graduation

Special To The Herald-Advocate

South Florida State College (SFSC) graduated a class of 11 firefighters and 11 paramedics during an evening ceremony at the SFSC University Center Auditorium at the Highlands Campus on Wednesday, May 18.

Receiving their certification from the Firefighter Minimum Standards program were Nathan Ahrens, Michael Bacevic, Zachary Boyette, Kyle Cooper, Clayton Johnson, Jenna Levine, Rebecca Oser, Rafael Ramos, Ana Saldana, Jorge Santiago, and Chelsea Whitmire.

The Firefighter Minimum

Standards career certificate prepares graduates for a career in fire service. A cohort of cadets enroll in the Firefighter I course with the expectation of continuing through to Firefighter II training.

Firefighter I training is required for volunteer firefighters. Firefighter II training is required for those who wish to be employed as professional firefighters in Florida.

Receiving their paramedic certificates were Carl Abelard, Alana Akouka, Terry Armstrong, Joshua Arturi, Chastity Bonney, Desmond Coleman, Lecil Deatherage, Jacob Keener, Roberto Morales Jr., Carlos

Rivera Jr., and James Simpson.

The graduates had just completed an 11-month college credit certificate course offered through SFSC's Emergency Medical Services (EMS) program.

Paramedics work as part of an emergency response team called out to traffic accidents, fires, and other life-threatening situations, providing advanced life support care in a pre-hospital setting.

Darius Livingston '07, captain of Polk County Fire Rescue, served as the ceremony's guest speaker. He reminded graduates of important aspects of the role

they are about to embrace. "Never forget where you came from," he began. "You are your own brand, so don't lose yourself as you meet others."

He also spoke about the training that each of the graduates received.

"Offer the highest quality care to everyone. Don't allow anyone to lower your standards. Care for others as you would care for your own family." In conclusion, he left the graduates with, "And, don't spend up to 20-30 years of your life in this job to not leave a legacy. Make an impact."

Later in the evening, three students in each program

were recognized for special achievement.

For fire, Michael Bacevic was acknowledged for having the Highest GPA, and Rafael Ramos was recognized for the Leadership award.

Ana Saldana was awarded with Most Heart, the student who showed the most determination and drive.

For paramedic, Jacob Keener received recognition for having the Highest GPA - Lecture, and James Simpson was recognized for having the Highest GPA - Lab. Chastity Bonney was awarded with Most Heart for her dedication and tenacity.

SFSC also offers a 16-

week course leading to employment as an emergency medical technician (EMT). EMTs provide entry-level patient care as part of an emergency response team.

SFSC offers a two-year Associate in Science in Emergency Medical Services, which includes training in both EMT and paramedic programs.

Upon completing this program, graduates will have the opportunity to work toward leadership positions in EMS.

For information about SFSC's public safety programs, contact Chris Fowler at 863-784-7278 or chris.fowler@southflorida.edu.

Strong Support Yields Strong Results

The Florida Chamber asserts that Florida is a great place to live, work, and play. We agree. Florida is working and we enjoy a quality lifestyle that is fulfilling for all residents and visitors. Florida is strong thanks to everyone who works hard and believes that a quality lifestyle begins with a solid educational foundation.

Our secondary and post-secondary educational systems are national leaders.

U.S. News and World Report considers Florida the top state for colleges and universities.

Locally, we benefit from a strong undergraduate institution, funded by a Governor and Legislature who believe in Florida's future. South Florida State College is grateful to Governor DeSantis, Senator Ben Albritton, and Representative Kaylee Tuck who champion workforce education and SFSC. Florida's economy is strong when we invest in the programs that undergird it.

In this season when we celebrate student success through formal graduation ceremonies, it's important to reflect on the sup-

port we receive from those who champion our initiatives in Tallahassee. Governor DeSantis believes in workforce education. Earlier this year, he visited South Florida State College to provide over \$400K to support SFSC's Commercial Vehicle Training Program.

Additionally, Senator Albritton and Representative Tuck sponsored legislation to support SFSC's nursing and first responder education pro-

grams through an expansion of advanced simulator training in a clinical immersion laboratory which benefits the growing number of program applicants in the College's three-county service region.

We are extremely grateful for the leadership and the support we receive from our Governor and members of the Florida Legislature to make sure that Florida flourishes both now and in the future to remain a great place to live, work, and play.

Dr. Thomas Leitzel, is president of South Florida State College; Mrs. Tami Cullens, is Chair of the South Florida State College District Board of Trustees.



Guest Column
By Dr. Thomas Leitzel
and Tami Collins

