

## ...inside DONORS AND Shakers



**3** Selby Foundation Grant provides scholarships to deserving DeSoto County students



**4** Jacarlene Foundation Gives \$150,000 to students in SFSC's trades programs



**6** Jeff Sikes is inducted into the Panther Alumni Society Hall of Fame



Nursing scholarship recipients

## Health Science Students Receive Scholarships

During the January meeting of South Florida State College's (SFSC) District Board of Trustees, 22 students studying for careers in the health sciences received approximately \$28,100 in scholarships.

The Florida College System Foundation (FCSF) and Florida Blue awarded Nursing and Allied Health scholarships to students in Nursing, Dental Education, and Radiography programs. The students may use the scholarships for tuition, textbooks, lab fees, and childcare.

Students receiving the scholarships are studying within three health science disciplines:

**Nursing:** Dusti Conners, Savannah Ewing, Jamilet Gondinez, Nubia Hernandez, Ana Ibanez, Flor Leon, Jenise Lopez, Karen Monterrosa, Keyshauna Parhams, TaiYonna Phillips, Magnolia Santiago, Monike Thomas, Griselda Vasquez, Juanita Vilafana-Rocha, and Aiani Walker

• THE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE CAME FROM FLORIDA BLUE AND THE FLORIDA COLLEGE SYSTEM FOUNDATION.

**Dental Education:** Abronikka Brown, Kerstin Jones, and Nora Ortiz

**Radiography:** Destiny Badillo, Juan Molina-Molina, Alyssa Perez, and Gemi Saunders

The scholarships are the result of a partnership between the FSCF and Florida Blue. The Florida Blue Nursing and Allied Health Scholarship was created to sustain a source of funding for student scholarships at Florida colleges, thereby meeting the state's growing need for skilled nurses and allied health professionals. The SFSC Foundation, Inc. provided a 50% match of the original award from the FCSF and

■ **SCHOLARS CONTINUES ON PAGE 4**

## Looking Back on a Busy and Productive Year

It's spring! This is a time when the SFSC Foundation looks forward to Commencement and looks back on our accomplishments throughout the 2024-25 academic year.

It's been a busy one for the Foundation. In December, we kicked off our fundraising activities with the Jacaranda Jubilee and Christmas Luncheon, then kept the momentum going in January with the Eighth Annual Million Dollar Golf Shootout — our best attended ever! Now we're putting the finishing touches on our final event of the season, the Learning and Legacy Gala.

This year's gala is extra-special because we're celebrating the College's Diamond Anniversary, our 60th year. The gala begins at 5:30 p.m. on March 28 in the Dr. Catherine P. Cornelius Student Services Complex. A feast is being prepared for guests, and those who wish can continue the evening with a concert by the legendary Three Dog Night at the Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts. Tickets to the gala are \$65 per person. Tickets to Three Dog Night can be purchased separately at [sfscArts.org](https://sfscArts.org).

Our students continue to be a source of pride. In December, Jeff Sikes, a 1980 graduate, took his place in the Panther Alumni Society Hall of Fame (see page 6). Jeff's exceptional coaching career reflects a life lived with integrity and purpose, which is something we hope for all of our graduates.

We're also cheering on Jalia Charlery, a promising Take Stock in Children scholar and SFSC dual enrollment student who is one of the 12 finalists vying for six Leaders for Life fellowships. If selected, she will receive \$40,000 to use in ways that support her college education. Jalia is the 13th local student to be a Leaders for Life finalist since the Take Stock program began here 29 years ago. The SFSC Foundation is the lead agency for the local Take Stock program, which means we take a keen interest in Jalia's success, and we wish her well! (Read her story on

page 6.)

If you'd like to be a champion for a deserving student like Jalia, how about becoming a Take Stock mentor? Mentors meet with Take Stock scholars for a minimum of 30 minutes twice a month to offer guidance and encouragement. Most mentors find great satisfaction in forming a relationship with a young person and watching them grow in confidence as they conquer personal and academic challenges. If you're ready to take this step, call Take Stock at 863-784-7343 or email [tsic@southflorida.edu](mailto:tsic@southflorida.edu) for information.

Of course we are ever mindful of the fact that the Foundation fulfills its mission of serving the College and its students because of financial support from our much-valued donors.

We're grateful for the \$28,100 in scholarships our Nursing, Dental Education, and Radiography students received from the Florida College System Foundation and Florida Blue. On page 3, you can read about the William G. and Mary Selby Foundation, which is making education affordable for DeSoto County students through a \$10,000 matching grant. SFSC's trade students are receiving a boost in scholarships, thanks to a \$150,000 donation from the Jacarlene Foundation (see page 4). Duke Energy honored Hispanic Heritage Month by presenting two students in the Electrical Lineworker program with \$5,600 in scholarships (see page 5). For many of our students, financial assistance in the form of a scholarship makes all the difference when it comes to bettering their lives through education.

A host of other grants — from the Walmart Foundation, the U.S. Department of Labor, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and the National Endowment for the Arts — are helping us grow and sustain our programs (see page 7).

We hope you'll join us in making SFSC a vibrant force for good in our community. And as always, go Panthers!



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## DONORS AND Shakers

is produced semiannually by the South Florida State College Foundation, Inc., to inspire charitable contributions in support of South Florida State College. The SFSC Foundation raises awareness of the value of an SFSC education and promotes student success through scholarships, facilities development, and program support. By supporting SFSC, the SFSC Foundation endeavors to enhance the ability of residents in our district to obtain a college education.



# SFSC Receives \$10,000 Grant from the Selby Foundation

SFSC has received a \$10,000 grant from the William G. and Marie Selby Foundation, Inc. to provide scholarships for students from DeSoto County who attend classes at any SFSC's campus – in DeSoto, Hardee, or Highlands County. These funds will be matched dollar for dollar through the SFSC Foundation, bringing the total funds for scholarships to \$20,000.

Scholarship awards ranged from \$750 for students enrolled between 6 and 8 hours and \$1,500 for full-time students.

Scholarships from the Selby Foundation grant were



available for the 2024 fall term and 2025 spring term. Recipients were required to be residents of DeSoto County, graduates of DeSoto County High School, and able to demonstrate financial

need. They also had to be accepted into or enrolled in a degree program at SFSC, and were required to maintain a minimum of a 3.0 GPA for the scholarship to be renewed.

"Once again, the William G. and Marie Selby Foundation has stepped up to meet the needs of our students," said Asena Mott, SFSC dean of off-campus instructional sites. "This scholarship is especially exceptional because it is renewable each year. Our DeSoto County High School graduation rate is rising and, with college tuition and other expenses being covered, our graduates can enter programs at any SFSC site and complete their college goals. The foresight and generosity of this donor is turning 'I can't' into 'It's Possible!'"



## We Thank Our 2025 Annual Sponsors

**PLATINUM LEVEL**



**GOLD LEVEL**









**SILVER LEVEL**





**BRONZE LEVEL**









Julie Anne Barber



Parker Hall



Lisa Jarrett

## SFSC Foundation Adds Three New Members to its Board of Directors

The SFSC Foundation welcomes three new members to its Board of Directors: Julie Anne Barber, Parker Hall, and Lisa Jarrett. Barber represents Hardee County, Hall represents DeSoto County, and Jarrett represents Highlands County. Jarrett and her family have been strong supporters of the

College for many years.

All are a welcome addition to the board as they bring fresh ideas and support from the three counties in SFSC's service district. We are confident that our board members will work together as a team toward building the future at SFSC.

## Hotel Jacaranda Lunch Buffet

Stop by the Hotel Jacaranda from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. on weekdays, and enjoy its famous all-you-can-eat lunch buffet with hot and cold entrees, side dishes, soup and salad bar, and dessert. The Grand Buffet is served from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Sundays.



# Jacarlene Foundation Donates \$150,000 to SFSC's Trade Programs

Last September, the SFSC Foundation received a \$150,000 donation from the Jacarlene Foundation to support students in trade programs.

The Jacarlene Foundation trustees stated, "The Jacarlene Foundation is proud of the efforts taking place on the campuses of South Florida State College and is pleased to be able to support the success of students pursuing their dreams and goals."

Established on Nov. 15, 1988, the Jacarlene Foundation focuses on philanthropic opportunities in education, wildlife, and arts in Florida. The mantra of the Foundation is "What

can we do for you" as they donate \$450 to \$1 million to organizations that improve life for Florida's human and animal residents.

As the population of SFSC's service district continues to grow, the College is committed to meeting the need for service workers in high-skilled occupations, like automotive collision technology, automotive service technology, cosmetology, electrical lineworker, air-conditioning and heating maintenance and repair, and many others. Scholarships provided through organizations like the Jacarlene Foundation are vital in helping many of




Students enrolled in SFSC's trades programs, like this future automotive service technician, are getting a boost in scholarships thanks to a \$150,000 donation from the Jacarlene Foundation.

these students complete their training, secure well-paying jobs, and become productive members of the community.

Students can apply for the Jacarlene Foundation Scholarship by emailing the SFSC Foundation at

[foundation@southflorida.edu](mailto:foundation@southflorida.edu) or calling 863-453-3133. Applicants must be attending a trade program at SFSC. Preference is given to students who demonstrate academic promise and financial need.



## The Learning & Legacy Gala


**SOUTH FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE FOUNDATION**

*Celebrating 60 years of higher education in our communities with South Florida State College*

**FRIDAY, MARCH 28, 2025**

Dr. Catherine P. Cornelius Complex  
SFSC Highlands Campus  
600 West College Drive, Avon Park


**4:30 p.m.**  
**Cocktail Hour**  
(Sponsors invited)



**5:30 p.m.**  
**Gala**  
(All ticket holders welcome)

**INDIVIDUAL TICKETS: \$65**

Hors d'oeuvres catered by SFSC Culinary Arts Students





Beer and wine served by 18 East

**Sponsorships Available and Tickets Online**

**863-453-3133**

[foundation@southflorida.edu](mailto:foundation@southflorida.edu)  
[southflorida.edu/sfsc-gala](https://southflorida.edu/sfsc-gala)

**2025 Annual Platinum Sponsor**  **AdventHealth**



## SCHOLARS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1



Dental Education scholarship recipients



Radiography scholarship recipients

Florida Blue, as the funds must be matched dollar for dollar by private donors at the local level.

SFSC's Health Science programs have a long-standing reputation for producing highly skilled healthcare professionals who treat their patients with genuine caring and compassion. The Florida Blue scholarships are vital for providing these students with financial assistance and encouraging them in their chosen path.

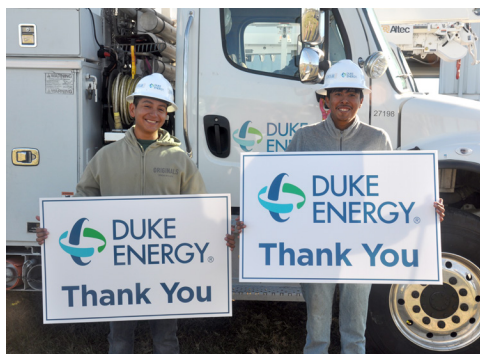


## Duke Foundation Gives Scholarships to Two Lineworker Students

In recognition of Hispanic Heritage Month, lineworker students Adam Gonzalez and Elliott Vazquez Palacios each received scholarships of \$5,600 from the Duke Energy Foundation. The scholarships will cover their tuition, books, and supplies while they earn their Electrical Lineworker Career Certificates through SFSC.

The scholarships are part of an initiative by Duke Energy and its Foundation to provide support for programs that uplift Hispanic students, businesses, and events in Florida.

SFSC is a proud Hispanic Serving Institution with an approximately 45% Hispanic student population. The



Adam Gonzalez (left) and Elliott Vazquez Palacios received Duke Energy Foundation Scholarships in honor of Hispanic Heritage Month.

College offers a variety of pathway options that provide students with the education and training they need for

high-paying positions within the region. The Electrical Lineworker Program is one of those options.

Electrical Lineworker students gain an understanding of electrical systems, operations, and safety while mastering competencies in electrical distribution, basic electrical theory, and underground electrical construction operations. The program provides practice in climbing, framing, building single and three-phase overhead lines, pole top and bucket rescue techniques, operating bucket trucks, and maintaining and repairing underground systems. Students who successfully complete the program earn a Career Certificate.

## Golf Shootout Raises \$16,029 for SFSC's Four Athletic Teams

The SFSC Foundation's Eighth Annual Million Dollar Hole-in-One Golf Shootout sponsored by Jarrett Ford Avon Park raised \$16,029 for SFSC Athletics, but brisk afternoon winds thwarted the golfers' efforts to win the big prize. The event took place Jan. 16-18 at the Sun 'N Lake Golf and Country Club in Sebring.

The 12 shootout finalists were Kyle Braxton, Dave Johnson, Jeff Polen, Steve Sortore, Tosh Banning, Scott Hitt, Jeff Taylor, Julian Gonzalez, Randy Bonney, Carlos Maldonado, Andy Polk, and Peter Elliott. The amateur golfers were challenged with landing a hole-in-one at the Deer Run course's 18th hole from a distance of 174 yards.

The 2025 shootout debuted a new event, the \$10,000 Putt Challenge, in which golfers tried to sink a hole-in-one in a single putt. Terri Thayer, the Putt Challenge finalist, missed her shot at the prize money when her ball stopped short of the hole.

The three-day shootout drew a record number of golfers with 116 vying for the \$1 million prize and 24 trying to putt their way to \$10,000.

Media sponsors were the Herald-Advocate, Highlands 1043, WWOJ, News Talk 730 AM and 95.3 FM, and



The 12 finalists in the SFSC Foundation's Eighth Annual Million-Dollar Golf Shoot appear with sponsors Bill and Lisa Jarrett (center).

Lite 105.7 FM. The in-kind sponsor was Quality Tees and Sporting Goods. Hitting zone sponsors were Edward Jones, Jeff Roth, Dr. Deborah Fuschetti, Heartland Flower Angels, Sunny South Exterminators, Swaine, Harris, and Wohl, P.A., Turner Furniture, and T. Bobo Athletic Medicine, Inc.

Proceeds are being shared by SFSC's four athletic teams: women's volleyball, women's cross country, men's baseball, and women's softball.

The Lady Panthers Volleyball and Cross Country teams compete in the fall, while the Panther Baseball and Lady Panther Softball have games during the spring. Everyone is invited to attend SFSC sporting events and cheer on



Putt Challenge finalist Terri Thayer (right) is congratulated by Bill and Lisa Jarrett.

the Panthers. In return, SFSC's student athletes show their gratitude for the community's support by volunteering their assistance at fundraising events like the golf shootout.



# Jeff Sikes Takes His Place in SFSC's Alumni Society Hall of Fame

Jeff Sikes was awarded SFSC's most prestigious alumni honor during the SFSC Foundation's annual Christmas Luncheon on Dec. 5. He joined past inductees Jeffrey Roth and John Sedlock in the SFSC Panther Alumni Society Hall of Fame.

"Mr. Sikes embodies this award throughout many areas of his life by serving others and his community, as a positive role model for his athletes and by making an impact in their lives both on and off the field," said Anastasia Fuchser, SFSC Alumni Association coordinator. "We are proud to call him an SFSC alumnus and bestow this honor upon him."

Sikes is a 1980 graduate of SFSC who played baseball for the Panthers during the 1979-80 seasons. He continued his collegiate baseball career at the University of Kentucky, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration in 1982. He was awarded a Master of Sports Science in Sports Management in 1993 from the United States Sports Academy.



SFSC Athletic Director Rick Hitt (left) congratulates former Panther Baseball player Jeff Sikes for being inducted into the SFSC Panther Alumni Society Hall of Fame.

Sikes served as head coach of Warner University's Royals Baseball Program for 40 years, retiring in 2023. Since then, he has participated in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes' Coaches Ministry. This 60-year-old organization encourages athletes and coaches to combine their passions for faith and athletics and "impact the world for Jesus Christ."

While at Warner University, Sikes became the longest-serving head coach in the Sun Conference and the only coach to have participated in every season in the Conference's history, with an impressive career record of 1,230 wins, 944 losses, and four ties. As head coach, he dedicated 40 years to building a legacy of success, sportsmanship, and mentorship. He has made a lasting impact on his baseball players, with 14 going on to careers in Major League Baseball and 50 becoming high school, college, or professional coaches. Many of his former athletes credit his guidance for contributing to their success.

"As someone who has witnessed Coach Sike's leadership, humility, and dedication to his players, his faith, and his community, I cannot think of a more deserving candidate for this honor," said Taylor Buenerkemper in her nomination of Sikes for the SFSC Panther Alumni Society Hall of Fame. "I am confident that his accomplishments, character, and influence will continue to inspire future generations."

## SFSC Alumni Reunite for a Day at the Ballfields

On Feb. 22, the SFSC Alumni Association hosted the 2025 Take Me Out to the Ball Game Reunion at the Panther Ballfields. It was a beautiful day to catch up with fellow alumni and participate in fun tailgate games.

Eric Bautista, 2011 SFSC alumnus, threw the first pitch at the baseball game and Jamie Sturm, 2012 SFSC alumna and former softball player, threw the first pitch for the softball game. There was quite a crowd out cheering on our Panther teams. Thank you to the alumni who participated, and we invite all alumni to join us at future reunions.

Membership in the Alumni Association comes with many benefits and is free to anyone who received a diploma, certificate, or degree from SFSC. For more information and to apply for membership, visit [southflorida.edu/alumni](https://southflorida.edu/alumni).





# Take Stock Scholar Jalia Charlery is a 2025 Leaders for Life Finalist

SFSC dual enrollment student Jalia Charlery is one of the 12 finalists for the 2025 Take Stock in Children Leaders for Life fellowship. This makes her the 13th local student to be considered for the fellowship since the Take Stock program was launched in SFSC's three-county service district 29 years ago.

The Leaders for Life fellowship is an initiative of the Asofsky Family Foundation, which supports programs aimed at helping the state's youth. It awards the fellowships in partnership with Take Stock in Children.

All Take Stock scholars who are high school seniors were eligible to apply for the Leaders for Life fellowship. This year's 12 finalists, including Charlery, received MacBook Pro laptop computers. From that pool, six will be chosen to receive a \$40,000 fellowship that they can use to cover non-tuition expenses such as housing, books, and transportation. The fellowship recipients have yet to be announced.

"I cannot think of a student more deserving of this opportunity," said Dr. Benjamin Carter, the local Take Stock in Children student services coordinator. "Upon reading the two essays Jalia submitted toward the fellowship, we could see that they were at a collegiate level. And her personality and presentation skills are excellent. We at Take Stock are so proud and excited to have Jalia representing us in the community and at this stage in the Leaders for Life process."

Take Stock in Children is a statewide program that provides at-risk students with a mentor and the promise of a college scholarship when they graduate from high school. In return, Take Stock scholars sign contracts in which they agree 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. Their parents also sign the contracts and agree to provide home



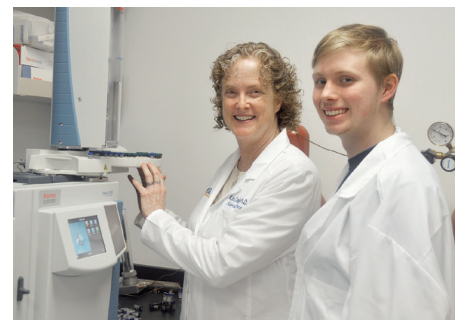
Jalia Charlery (left) is congratulated by Take Stock in Children mentor Sarah Miller for being a finalist for a Take Stock in Children Leaders for Life fellowship.

environments conducive to education.

The SFSC Foundation is the lead agency for the local Take Stock program that serves DeSoto, Hardee, and Highlands counties. Since being established in 1996, the local program has awarded Florida Prepaid college scholarships to more than 667 students. It accepts students in grades eight through 10.

Charlery is dually enrolled at Sebring High School and SFSC and is on track to receive her high school diploma in May. She is a member of the National Honors Society, Sebring High School's Girls Varsity Tennis team, and the Superintendent Student Council. She is secretary of the Sebring Chamber of Commerce Junior Ambassadors, president of the Sebring High School Student Government Association, and a member of the Sebring High School Varsity Choir.

Charlery's Take Stock mentor for the last five years has been Sarah Miller, who was her eighth grade science and AVID teacher at Sebring Middle School and her National Junior Honor Society sponsor. Charlery said that Miller "never fails to support me in my many endeavors, whether that is giving me advice for my many rigorous classes or showing up as a fan on the sideline. She has truly taught me the meaning of overcoming obstacles that many would consider life-defining."



A grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture is making it possible for Dr. Kate Calvin and her students to continue partnering with Bok Tower Gardens to study endangered Florida *Ziziphus celata*.

## SFSC Secures Key Grants to Advance Education, Research, and the Arts

Last fall SFSC received numerous grants that are contributing vital financial support to its programs and initiatives.

■ The Avon Park Walmart Store, through the Walmart Foundation Spark Good Local Community Grant, provided \$1,000 to bolster faculty professional development.

■ The U.S. Department of Labor, through the Florida Department of Education, awarded \$280,116 to the Farmworker Career Development Program. The program offers career and educational support to 122 migrant and seasonal farmworkers and their families.

■ SFSC received a \$12,000 grant from the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The grant is making it possible for SFSC and its students to continue a research partnership with Bok Tower Gardens aimed at restoring sandhill habitats and conserving endangered Florida *Ziziphus celata*.

■ A \$10,000 National Endowment for the Arts-Art Project Grants is helping SFSC's Performing Arts bring engaging arts experiences to the community.

South Florida State College  
600 West College Drive  
Avon Park, FL 33825

## On the Calendar

### Foundation Events .....

#### **SFSC Foundation Learning and Legacy Gala**

FRIDAY, MARCH 28, 2025 | 5:30 P.M.  
SFSC Highlands Campus  
RSVP required

#### **The Jacaranda Jubilee**

MONDAY, DEC. 1, 2025 | 6:30 P.M.  
The Hotel Jacaranda Veranda  
RSVP required

#### **Giving Tuesday**

THURSDAY, DEC. 2, 2025  
All day online  
[southflorida.edu/support-sfsc/givingtuesday](https://southflorida.edu/support-sfsc/givingtuesday)

#### **SFSC Christmas Luncheon**

THURSDAY, DEC. 4, 2025 | 11:30 P.M.  
The Hotel Jacaranda  
RSVP required

#### **Ninth Annual Million Dollar Hole-in-One Golf Shootout**

TBD  
Sun 'N Lake Golf Club, Sebring

### Board Meetings .....

#### **Executive Committee Meeting**

TUESDAY, APRIL 8, 2025 | NOON  
Zoom

#### **Foundation Board Meeting**

TUESDAY, MAY 13, 2025 | 5:30 P.M.  
SFSC Board Room

### SFSC Events .....

#### **Spring Commencement**

THURSDAY, MAY 8, 2025  
Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the  
Performing Arts  
SFSC Highlands Campus



## 4 Ways to Support the Foundation

**1** Become a Friend of SFSC by setting up an online recurring donation of \$25 or more per month using the QR code.



**2** Sponsor a fundraising event, such as the Learning and Legacy Gala, the Jacaranda Jubilee, the Christmas Luncheon, or the Million Dollar Hole-in-One Golf Shootout.

**3** Give stock or securities. For information, call 863-453-3133 or email [foundation@southflorida.edu](mailto:foundation@southflorida.edu).

**4** Join the SFSC Heritage Society by including the SFSC Foundation in your will or trust, or name the SFSC Foundation as a beneficiary of a life insurance policy.