SCF committed to vets’ education

Guest column by SCF Venice Provost Darlene Wedler-Johnson

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On Veterans Day we have an opportunity to reflect on the debt we owe to our American military personnel. For our nation’s freedoms, our servicemen and women pay a dear price — some with their lives. We might ask ourselves how we are giving back to our active duty personnel and veterans returning home to their families.

Providing local quality education hand-in-hand with veterans support is a powerful way for our community to give back. As provost of the South Sarasota County campus of State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota, it has been my privilege to get to know many exemplary veterans taking classes here. I’m honored to dedicate this column to them, and, with their permission, to share a few of their stories.

Former U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Robert Ley is working on an A.S. business management degree at SCF and pulling off a 4.0 grade point average. He credits his 11 years’ experience as a military nuclear electronics technician for giving him confidence to take on challenges.

“At first I wanted to burn my way through the curriculum but SCF professors inspired me to take my time and enjoy learning,” Ley said.

He added that campus connections are like those in the military, where everyone is “one big family.”

Army veteran Spc. E4 Jessica Beattie left school at 17 and served in the military with her husband. The self-described “math geek” has lived in Venice since she was 5 years old and is thrilled to find so many professors who take time to help students.

Steve Stinson agrees. The former Marine Corps first sergeant, who has 18-plus years of service, now is pursuing a degree in teaching.

“He said, “The attitude here is palpable,” Stinson said, “The professors and administration have a heart for contributing to the success of others and the students have a purpose in their step.”

Marc Killam was a petty officer third class in the U.S. Navy and also served in the Army. He had quit school earlier but said enrolling at SCF has been well worth the effort. Killam wants to use
his military-acquired skills in leadership, teamwork and organization to fulfill his new mission of doing well in classes and helping other SCF veterans succeed.

These students are among more than 400 veterans from all branches of the military currently enrolled at SCF collegewide. G.I. Joe magazine named SCF a 2012 Military Friendly School and ranked us in the top 20 percent of all colleges, universities and trade schools for nonfinancial efforts to recruit and retrain veteran students, our financial commitment through tuition and other program benefits, and academic accreditations.

When these veterans graduate from SCF, they will continue to serve by adding value to the local economy. They will enter the workforce carrying both real-life experiences from the military and current career training.

Positioned to land wellpaying jobs, they will make significant contributions to our tax base. These veterans will raise the area’s level of educational achievement, helping to build a more robust workforce that helps to attract new businesses.

Author Flora Edwards said, “In helping others, we shall help ourselves, for whatever good we give out completes the circle and comes back to us.”

Veterans, SCF is proud to have you continue your lifelong learning and giving with us. Thank you for the sacrifices you have made to support our nation’s freedom.

Darlene Wedler-Johnson serves as provost (campus executive officer) at SCF Venice.

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