SOUTH VENICE — State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota Venice campus Provost Darlene Wedler-Johnson likes to call SCF “the area’s bestkept secret.”

This week, Wedler-Johnson and Kathy Walker, SCF’s director of public affairs and marketing, gave a tour of the campus — including some exciting new developments — to members of the local media.

The tour, which ranged from the Emerging Technology labs to outdoor teaching spaces — some students take an airboat onto the campus’ lake to study ecology — and art studios, highlighted how the campus is growing and adapting to both technological advances and the changing market.

“It’s got to be an evolution,” Wedler-Johnson said. “One of the things that has always driven this campus is an innovative spirit.”

More than 2,000 students attend class at the Venice campus each semester. Many are women, and a large percentage of them are juggling families and multiple jobs, Wedler-Johnson said.

Adrienne Gould-Choquette, director of the Emerging Technology program, said a lot of what goes on in the two newest degree programs — Associate in Science in Engineering Technology and Associate in Science in Construction Management — is “cutting-edge.”

“Students, whatever their minds can imagine, we can make happen,” she said, pointing out equipment, including a three-dimensional cutter, which on Tuesday was forming a key clip that can attach to a belt, designed by an SCF student.

Much of the equipment — the same as used by manufacturers, Gould-Choquette said, enabling students to obtain real-world experience — has come to the school through grants.

Wedler-Johnson said robotics equipment also will be coming to SCF Venice this spring.

In the Science Department, professors are partnering with Sarasota and Manatee county high schools to encourage more students to pursue STEM — science, technology, engineering and math — careers by providing a “lab in a box,” said SCF Science Lab Assistant Victoria Ramirez.

“They’re at North Port High School this week, in five separate classes,” she said, studying DNA profiles using electrophoresis.

SCF also will play host to a STEM Summit on Feb. 18 for area middle and high school students, who will spend time studying water taken from the lake on campus, launching potatoes into the air, and examining DNA profiles.

“They’ll be extracting their own DNA,” Wedler-Johnson said, via cheek swabs, “and they get a necklace to wear it around their necks.”
The tour also went through classrooms devoted to legal assisting — complete with shelves of case law; SCF’s Alternative Teacher Certification program taught by practicing teachers; and nursing labs, where students have the opportunity to work with simulated patients that, run by air compressors, give birth, have high blood pressure and suffer from other disorders.

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At left: Victoria Ramirez, a lab assistant in SCF’s Science Department, points out the “lab in a box.” SCF is partnering with both North Port and Sarasota high schools — it’s at NPHS this week — to bring more advanced science, including examining DNA profiles with the help of electrophoresis, into high school classrooms.

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At right: SCF freshman Megan Brown of North Port works on a tree sculpture she molded out of clay in one of SCF’s art studios.