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Amazing SCF
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I have been on the road for a bit and have lots to share with you. I have been to Sarasota, down to the Plantation and on 41 over the last few weeks and will dedicate some space to inform you about what I have witnessed as I am most amazed at the entities and the people who make the gears turn in whatever their chosen path happens to be.

Let's start here, shall we?

Nestled on a beautiful piece of land south on U.S. 41, roughly the same distance from Venice as it is North Port and Englewood, lies the Venice campus of State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota. This facility is most certainly one that pays attention to the needs of our youth and structures their education accordingly.

This institution is ably led by Provost Darlene C. Wedler-Johnson, who also happens to be an incredibly warm and friendly human being; additionally, she was co-tour guide. I told her in November I wanted to ride on a golf cart and she delivered. The provost's partner for this event was none other than Kathy Walker, director of public affairs and marketing. She is a font of knowledge about her college and can answer just about any question concerning the campus, the classes and the curriculum. However, her alligator knowledge is limited.

The day started out with a light lunch and an overview of the facility, staff and operations. It was a well-timed and very informative lunch at which we learned an awful lot about SCF. For instance, did you know that there are 480 full-time employees serving both counties?

State College of Florida is in the business of helping people change their lives. That's a pretty bold statement when you think about it. I asked, “What does it mean to have SCF in the community and for students to graduate from SCF”? The answer was pretty compelling, and I will try to frame it for you.

First, this is an open-door college; anyone with a high school diploma or GED can be admitted to SCF. Students are a combination of people recently graduated from high school, people coming back after long separations from the education process or people having to retool as their jobs are fading away.

SCF also attracts Bright Futures scholars and other achievers for various reasons that include scholarships and parental influence. Overall, students tend to make a deliberate choice to attend SCF instead of other schools.

This sets up an incredible teaching environment as you combine all the ages, skills and experience levels into one setting and simply teach, taking advantage of youth, experience and worldviews that encompass generations. That has to be a stimulating experience every day.

A healthy mixture of human resolve and higher education has produced almost 40,000 graduates in a 54-year span, and a majority of these graduates stay close to home. They teach our kids, build our houses, birth our children and work for our newspapers. The graduates pay taxes, serve on boards and handle concessions at Little League games.

SCF shapes lives, futures and progress while making a student’s two- or four-year stay there an educational dream. If you don’t think that SCF is woven into the very fabric of our community via its graduates and the work they do, hop into your car and go witness the dream in action. I did and I am darn glad I took the time.

SCF is contributing to the future of this community and the people in our region. I often speak of moving forward as a human being, as a newspaper and as community — how do we shape the next 70 years? Friends, the people at SCF are not just talking about it, they are doing that — today.