SCF at 55 Years and Counting: A Pioneering Professor Bears Witness

On Sept. 17, 2012, SCF celebrated its 55th anniversary since the State Board of Education established it in 1957 as Manatee Junior College. As the region’s first and largest public college, State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota (SCF) has a rich multigenerational tradition of enriching lives by providing the community access to affordable and quality education. And one professor has both made history and witnessed history at this College.

SCF Art Professor Pam Stewart remembers when the College began its first classes in a downtown Bradenton high school with 502 students. She taught art appreciation as a substitute teacher when she first came to the College in 1958 after serving as a teacher and coordinator of art programs for Manatee County’s 15 elementary schools.

The new opportunity gave Stewart a way to teach what she loves most: art history. Throughout the years, she expanded the program to include additional courses that her male colleagues were not credentialled to teach. Stewart thrived as a college-level instructor, and later as a full-time faculty member, in what was then a male-dominated field. Over half a century, she has taught art to generations of SCF students.

Stewart’s love for art was influenced by her father who was a speech and drama professor at the University of Iowa. Although he clearly loved teaching, he did not allow her to seek an education degree before she first earned a liberal arts degree. “He always said, ‘Learn what you want to teach before you learn how to teach it,’” she said.

After graduating from the University of Iowa with her bachelor’s degree, Stewart earned a certificate in commercial photography at New York City’s School of Modern Photography, a master’s degree at the University of South Florida, and an EdS at Florida Atlantic University.

While Stewart’s own educational experience was at the university level, she became a strong advocate for community colleges, believing that the system was the perfect fit for students who were not ready to go away to college.

“But, you can live at home and do it on a budget. I’m totally convinced it’s a wonderful idea for students to thrive in a secure, caring environment,” she said. Over the years, Stewart has seen many visible changes at the College that have improved opportunities for students, including new buildings and updated technology.

Back in the day, there weren’t so many luxuries. In September 1959, the College began offering classes on its new campus in Bradenton, but the bare-bones buildings lacked an important modern feature: air conditioning. Stewart recalls teaching an art history class with the blinds down in unbearable temperatures, and nicknaming the course, The Black Hole of Calcutta 101.

The Bradenton campus, which was built on what was once known as Jackson’s pasture, also lacked proper drainage. Soon after the campus opened, heavy rains came. After the proverbial 40 days and 40 nights of rain, the campus became a mud pit, keeping the maintenance crew busy towing trapped cars.

While the College’s modern facilities and award-winning landscapes are visible signs of providing expanded access to education, the College has also progressed in giving a diverse population of students an opportunity to achieve their dream of a college education.

In 1962, under the leadership of President Sam Neil Jr. and with the board’s support, SCF, then MJC, admitted its first African-American students.

Stewart, who shares a storied heritage with many other notable professors, counts herself privileged to have known the late Constance Gil- brandy, the first African-American male to earn the distinction of professor at SCF.

Like Stewart, Professor Gilbrandy inspired students to follow in his footsteps, and SCF alumna Iberia Tyson, who was taught and

SCF Historical Milestones

- In 1973, college classes were offered at Venice High School for residents of south Sarasota County. The current full-service campus in Venice was dedicated on March 30, 1985.
- The College’s name was changed to Manatee Community College in 1985.
- In January 2003, SCF opened the Center for Innovation and Technology at Lakewood Ranch Corporate Park on 5 acres of land donated by Schroeder-Manatee Ranch. In 2007, Schroeder-Manatee Ranch donated an additional 5 acres, and the Medical Technology and Simulation Center opened in 2010.
- SCF won approval in 2009 from the State Board of Education to deliver its first baccalaureate degree, the Bachelor of Science in Nursing.
- In July 2009, the College’s name changed to State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota.
- SCF has graduated 40,000 students in its 55-year history.
- SCF serves 30,000 college credit students annually and an additional 25,000 noncredit participants at campuses in Bradenton, Lakewood Ranch, Venice, and eCampus.
- SCF offers the Associate in Arts (university transfer) degree, 20-plus Associate in Science (career track) degrees; and eight baccalaureate degrees.

November 2012 WEST COAST WOMAN