Kalaivani Muhundan was a nurse at Manatee Memorial Hospital who wanted to return to college but found it discouraging that she had to drive to Tampa to do it.

That changed when State College of Florida added a bachelor of science in nursing degree at its local campuses, its first baccalaureate degree.

“I heard about the BSN program at SCF’s campus in Bradenton,” recalled Muhundan, 47, a native of Sri Lanka, who graduated in 2006 with a two-year degree in nursing from SCF.

She signed up to pursue the baccalaureate, or four-year degree, attending classes in Bradenton one day a week for 18 months.

Today, she plans to attend graduation ceremonies at the college’s Bradenton campus (the school also has campuses in South Venice and Lakewood Ranch). College officials said 38 students had earned BSN degrees.

Two ceremonies will be held, one at 10:30 a.m. and another at 1 p.m., to accommodate 325 graduates expected to participate out of 729 students eligible for graduation.

It will be a relief to simply go to work again instead of having to study in her off-hours as well, Muhundan said.

“I’m glad it’s over,” she said, adding she juggled 12-hour work days as an RN, plus the needs of a husband and family — yes, even delegating housework — in order to reach graduation day.

“It’s over now, so I have to get back to my housework,” she said, noting that her husband and two teenagers pitched in to help while she was taking classes.

Two other nursing students graduating today are from Englewood — Elizabeth Rigney and Lori Pistone.

According to college officials, after graduating from SCF associate’s in nursing program in 2006, Rigney — who will speak at the ceremonies — took a job as a cardiac care nurse in the intensive care unit before being promoted to charge nurse at Englewood Community Hospital. As a result of earning her BSN degree from SCF, she will start a new job as a clinical documentation specialist, which requires superior clinical assessment skills to work with physicians to make sure documentation is correct, college officials say.
Pistone works as a home health nurse for Venice Regional Medical Center. When she first attended the open house for SCF’s BSN program, she decided to apply for the program because it was close to home and it was an opportunity for her to explore other areas of the medical field, she said. After graduation, Pistone plans to pursue a graduate degree in children’s mental health or in counseling to become an advocate for an early childhood intervention program.

Another graduating student is Marie Borsellino, of Sarasota, an RN at Sarasota Memorial Hospital Healthcare System. She has worked 24 years primarily in the field of oncology.

“This program was at the right time,” she said. “It gave me the opportunity to go for it. It was a wonderful experience, and I feel like I’ve gained tools that will help me in my current role and the rest of my career, enhancing my professional practice.”

She’s planning to continue higher education: She has been accepted for a doctoral program in nursing by Florida State University, she said.

FSU’s doctor of nursing practice degree at SCF’s Lakewood Ranch campus is open to anyone eligible, and has been available now for a year, said Jessica Klipa, SCF spokeswoman. Rigney said she also plans to apply for the program.

“We will add the FSU master’s in nursing degree this fall, which will give an opportunity for local residents to take advantage of the full continuum of nursing education at SCF, starting with the AS in nursing and BS in nursing from SCF, and the master’s and doctor’s from FSU, offered at SCF,” Klipa said.