

TALLAHASSEE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

In the News



March 15, 2013- April 15, 2013

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March 2013-April 2013

TALLAHASSEE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

In the News



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2013 'Brain Bowl' continues today

The 2013 Tallahassee Democrat Big Bend High School Bowl – now celebrating its 30th year – opened Friday with 216 students from around the Big Bend Region competing at [Tallahassee Community College](#).

Today's portion of the bowl is the double-elimination semi-finals. The top two teams after today will advance to the finals at Aquilina Howell Instructional Services Center on March 27.

The Tallahassee Democrat, with the cooperation of [Tallahassee Community College](#), Leon County Schools, Brooks LeBoeuf Bennett Foster and Gwartney, P.A. and Envision Credit Union, sponsors the Big Bend High School Bowl.

The Democrat, Brooks LeBoeuf Bennett Foster and Gwartney, P.A. and Envision Credit Union donate more than \$5000 in cash scholarships and gift certificates as prizes. The first-place team wins a \$2500 scholarship from the Tallahassee Democrat and the runner-up, \$1,250 from Envision Credit Union.

Established by the Tallahassee Democrat, the high school bowl encourages academic excellence and promotes teamwork among students. During the competition, teams answer questions as quickly as possible about current events, science, math, language arts, social studies and popular culture.

Stay tuned to [Tallahassee.com](#) for results from today's competition.

Tallahassee Democrat - March 17, 2013

Students buzz in Big Bend High School Brain Bowl competition

ELIZABETH M. MACK

Morgan Walker has a love for trivia.

The Franklin County School senior has been participating in trivia nights at restaurants — something she picked up an interest in from her father — since she was 13. So it's no surprise she was poised to participate in the 30th Big Bend High School Brain Bowl.

"Mainly it's fun," the 17-year-old said, who also competed last year. "But I'm also extremely competitive. So even when it's my teammates who may beat me to the buzzer, there's competition there, because I want to be the first to answer the question."

The trivia competition started on Friday at [Tallahassee Community College](#) with 36 teams separated into three divisions based on their scores from previous years and experience in the competition. By Saturday there were still 24 teams competing in the double elimination round. Now only two remain. The top two teams will advance to the finals round at Aquilina Howell Instructional Services Center on March 27.

The winning teams receive a scholarship which goes to the school, said Jeanie Booth, Community Relations and Newspaper in Education Manager at the Tallahassee Democrat. The first-place team wins \$2,500 and the runner-up, \$1,250.

During the competition, teams were asked questions about current events, science, math, language arts, social studies and popular culture.

For Hunter Brown, a 17-year-old senior at Florida State University School, the brain bowl was a test of his memory.

"I'm not very competitive but I like to pit my brain against others and see where I stand and what I remember from school," he said. "I remember strange things like the Turtle was the first submarine ever. I don't know why I do, but I do and that's why I thought I would do well in this."

The event was established by the Tallahassee Democrat to recognize academic excellence and promote teamwork among high school students, Booth said. Partnering with the newspaper to put on the brain bowl are [TCC](#), Leon County Schools, Brooks LeBoeuf Bennett Foster and Gwartney, P.A. and Envision Credit Union.

The event is also applauded by area teachers.

"I think it's important for (the students)," said Dale Millender, high school physics and mathematics teacher at Franklin County School. "With my students, with them being from a small school, I think it's good for building their confidence in their abilities. They can see that they can compete in a world outside of Franklin County. We have some talented intellectuals. I'm very proud of them. And we're grateful that the Tallahassee Democrat does this for the students."

Florida College System Brings Billions into State's Economy

Elizabeth Nickerson

March 18, 2013

Tallahassee, FL--Students will be getting their monies worth out of a Florida college education. The state will see a return on its investment too.

The State Board of Education and the Florida College System joined forces to break down the numbers. A new study shows that Florida colleges are bringing in the big bucks into the economy.

"The investment of the Florida College System is a really smart investment not only for the student," said Randy Hanna, Chancellor for the Division of Florida Colleges. "But also for the state of Florida."

The Florida College System announced new findings that show that Florida colleges bring in more than 26 billion dollars every year into the state's economy. And for every dollar invested in Florida Colleges, a student receives an average of 6 dollars in higher future income. 93 percent of those students remain in Florida and contribute to the economy.

"It is fabulous news that we know that students will earn that great money once they are into their career field and we are happy to see that the data shows that as well," said Alice Maxwell, a [Tallahassee Community College](#) Representative.

According to [TCC](#), if a student has to take out a loan for their college education they can feel more assured to know that their earnings will be higher with a [TCC](#) degree.

"I feel like I actually did the right step as in filling out the loan and going to school here," said Eristerial Mcneal, a Florida College Student.

An average starting salary of a Florida College graduate is more than forty thousand a year. So, a big chunk of change will be going into a student's pocket after they get their diploma.

SPC forum addresses youth incarcerations

SEMINOLE – Why does the United States incarcerate far more youth – 336 youth per 100,000 population – than any other nation in the world? And why is Florida’s youth incarceration rate 40 percent higher than the national average?

These are among issues that will be explored in depth in the second of a series of forums at St. Petersburg College on Wednesday, March 27. The forum, titled “Kids Are Different: Youth in the Justice System,” is presented by the Project for Accountable Justice. It will be from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Seminole Campus of SPC, 9200 113th St. N.

PAJ is a coalition that combines academic research and practical solutions with the goal of helping state lawmakers reform Florida’s criminal justice system. The partnership includes the Institute for Strategic Policy Solutions at SPC, Florida State University, Baylor University, and [Tallahassee Community College](#).

America’s juvenile justice system was established more than 100 years ago precisely because it was recognized that kids are different from adults. But today, that distinction often is blurred by the criminal justice system. The U.S. is the only country that regularly applies life sentences without parole on juvenile offenders. More than 2,500 inmates in U.S. prisons are serving life sentences without parole for crimes committed as juveniles.

A panel of experts will review the vast challenges that remain in how the state and nation address youth involved in delinquent behaviors and crime. The panelists will discuss reform efforts, the latest in research and promising practices, and recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings driving changes in how we handle the unique needs of children involved in our justice systems.

Members of the panel are:

- Major Scott Ballou, Seminole County Sheriff’s Office, Juvenile Justice Division.
- Jeanette Moll, juvenile justice policy analyst, Texas Public Policy Foundation/Right on Crime.
- Ajmel Quereshi, staff counsel, National Prison Project, American Civil Liberties Union.
- Irene Sullivan, senior judge, Florida Circuit Court, Juvenile and Family Divisions.

Joe Clark, president of the Eckerd Family Foundation, will moderate the program.

Based at Florida State University, the Project on Accountable Justice provides innovative research that provides options for criminal justice reform throughout Florida and the nation to turn the tide on expensive prisons with high recidivism rates. The first forum in the series explored the effect of incarceration in reducing crime. Future programs will look at pretrial decision-making and citizen oversight of the criminal justice system.

While the entire series is free and open to the public, advance registration is requested.

Go to www.spcollege.edu/solutions, or call 394-6251.

Charlton Escarmant: Miami man convicted in \$3.3 million tax refund fraud scheme

WILLIAM E. LEWIS JR.

Late Tuesday, United States Attorney Wilfredo A. Ferrer announced that a jury convicted Charlton Escarmant of one count of conspiracy to submit false claims to the Internal Revenue Service, one count of access device fraud, and two counts of aggravated identity theft, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Florida.

Sentencing for Charlton Escarmant, 29, of Miami, has been scheduled for June 17, 2013, before U.S. District Judge Lenard. He faces a possible statutory maximum sentence of 24 years in prison.

In October, Escarmant and co-conspirator Arthy Icart were charged in a five-count federal indictment for their participation in an identity theft tax refund scheme. According to testimony and evidence presented at trial, some of the personal identification information used to file fraudulent income tax returns by Escarmant and Icart was stolen from [Tallahassee Community College's](#) financial aid office.

During testimony in the Escarmant trial, it was learned that more than 3,200 names found on his computer came from [Tallahassee Community College](#).

To execute the scheme, Escarmant filed tax returns using the stolen identification information and also created false W-2 forms in his own name with fictitious employer information. Escarmant's W-2 form falsely claimed that he was a veterinarian at Central Broward Animal Hospital. Escarmant never worked at the Central Broward Animal Hospital.

At the time of their arrest, Escarmant and Icart unlawfully possessed approximately 22 pre-paid tax debit cards in the names of other individuals. During the course of the scheme, they submitted approximately 400 fraudulent tax returns to the Internal Revenue Service, seeking more than \$3.3 million in tax refunds.

Icart pled guilty in January to charges of conspiracy to file fraudulent claims, access device fraud, and aggravated ID theft. Sentencing in his case is scheduled for April 1st before U.S. District Judge Lenard.

During the press conference following Escarmant's conviction, Ferrer commended the investigative efforts of the Strike Force and extended a special commendation to the IRS-CI and the North Miami Beach Police Department.

Ferrer also thanked the [Tallahassee Community College](#) for their cooperation during this investigation.

The case on behalf of the government was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Michael B. Nadler and Elina Rubin-Smith.

According to the Federal Trade Commission, the state of Florida had the highest rate of identity theft in the United States last year. While Florida ranks highest in the nation for identity theft, the incidence rate in Miami has reached epidemic proportions. Although Florida's rate of 178 identity theft complaints per 100,000 residents is the highest in the nation, it is dwarfed by the Miami rate of 324.1 complaints per 100,000 residents.

A report by the U.S. Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration last September determined that Florida has the highest rate of stolen identity tax refund fraud in the United States. The report identified 74,496 potentially fraudulent returns filed in Miami alone that resulted in more than \$280 million in fraudulent refunds.

The City of Miami's per capita number of false income tax returns based on identity theft was 46 times the national average and its per capita stolen income tax refund fraud dollar value was more than 70 times the national average.

Tax return identity theft in the United States is expected to grow substantially. According to the TIGTA report, the Internal Revenue Service estimates that they could issue as much as \$21 billion in fraudulent tax refunds over the next five years.

In an attempt to combat the rising wave of stolen identity income tax refund scams and armed with newly enhanced investigative and prosecutorial tools under the Department of Justice's Tax Directive 144, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Florida established the South Florida Identity Theft Tax Fraud Strike Force. Members of the Strike Force include IRS-CI, U.S. Secret Service, FBI, U.S. Postal Inspection Service, City of Aventura Police Department, Miami-Dade Police Department, North Miami Beach Police Department, and the SSA-OIG.

The focus of the Identity Theft Tax Refund Strike Force is to investigate and prosecute stolen income tax refund scams in South Florida.

TCC students among victims in \$3.3-million ID-theft case

Jeff Burlew

The personal information of about 3,300 current and former **Tallahassee Community College** students was compromised as part of a scheme by two South Florida men to file fake tax returns seeking millions in refunds.

TCC officials announced the theft of the computer data Friday, saying they recently learned about it from federal officials. The personal information was stolen from **TCC's** financial-aid office in March 2011.

TCC is sending letters to students potentially impacted starting Monday, said **TCC** Police Chief David Hendry. The letters will detail what steps students can take to check the security of their identities. **TCC** also is providing additional resources, including a hotline for students to call for more information.

"**TCC** values the protection of private information, so we take this matter very seriously," he said. "We have identified the group of individuals whose information may have been compromised, and we will immediately begin the process of contacting each one."

Hendry said that as a result of the security breach, **TCC** has identified and fixed vulnerabilities in its financial-aid system.

Two Miami men, Charlton Escarmant, 29, and Arthy Icart, 24, were indicted Oct. 5, 2012, on federal charges that they participated in a conspiracy to steal identities so they could file phony tax returns for more than \$3.3 million in refunds.

Officials with the U.S. Attorneys Office in Miami confirmed that former and current **TCC** students were victims in the case. They also said more than 3,200 names found on a computer in Escarmant's possession came from **TCC**.

Hendry said **TCC** computers were not hacked from outside the community college. Instead, someone accessed computers within **TCC** and stole the personal information.

"Somehow or another that got into the hands of those people in Miami," he said.

The **TCC** Police Department and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement are investigating who accessed the financial-aid system and how the information ended up part of the tax-fraud scheme, he added.

On Tuesday, jurors in Escarmant's federal trial found him guilty of charges including submitting false claims to the IRS and aggravated identity theft. He is scheduled to be sentenced June 17 before U.S. District Judge Joan A. Lenard. Escarmant is facing up to 24 years in federal prison. Icart pleaded guilty Jan. 17 and is set to be sentenced April 1.

The Internal Revenue Service's Criminal Investigation Division and the North Miami Beach Police Department investigated as part of the Identity Theft Tax Refund Strike Force.

Groundbreaking for Westgate Community Center

Florida Department of Children and Families

TALLAHASSEE- With more than 54,000 homeless statewide, including more than 1,000 reported by the Big Bend Homeless Coalition in January 2013 in Tallahassee, an increasing number of individuals are seeking emergency shelter services from community-based, community-supported homeless shelters. Homeless shelters provide essential services to individuals and families in times of critical need but are not a long-term solution to homelessness.

On Thursday, March 28, Department of Children and Families Secretary David Wilkins will join Rick Kearney, President of Mainline Information Systems, and numerous local social services and non-profit agencies to unveil a solution to address shelter overcrowding and the high cost of emergency services, and to provide a flexible path to independence for the homeless and low-income individuals and families in our community.

Partners will break ground Thursday on the Westgate Community residential campus, an outgrowth of the Renaissance Community Center, which opened in April 2012 to address the number of homeless residing in local emergency shelters by providing tools and resources to help people return to independence.

The Westgate Community residential campus will address the critical need for low-cost, safe and secure housing for our residents who are most vulnerable and in need. When complete, the campus will house between 180-300 residents in 13 residential units with flexible floor plans. The affordable housing will be made available throughout our community to individuals or families as transitional or permanent housing.

WHAT: Westgate Community Residential Campus Press Conference and Groundbreaking Ceremony

WHO: Department of Children and Families; Mainline Information Systems; Mayor John Marks; The Tallahassee-Leon County Emergency Shelter Board; United Way of the Big Bend; ECHO Outreach Ministries; Catholic Charities of Northwest Florida; Lutheran Social Services; Fostering Achievement Fellowship Program at [Tallahassee Community College](#); Elder Care Services; Goodwill Industries, Inc.; Good Samaritan Network; FSU School of Medicine; Mad Dog Construction; Apalachee Center; Veterans Village; Ability First; Big Bend Homeless Coalition; local elected officials; community, business and non-profit leaders and more

WHEN: Thursday, March 28, 11:30 a.m.

WHERE: Site of Westgate Community residential campus

Blountstown St. between W. Tharpe St. and Tennessee St. Tallahassee

Career education bill would ease testing requirements for high school graduation

TRAVIS PILLOW

Expand programs that allow students to obtain industry-approved credentials as early as in elementary school.

Pay bonuses to teachers whose students earn industry certifications.

Eliminate what Senate Education Chairman John Legg called "arbitrary roadblocks" to high school graduation, in the form of must-pass end-of-course exams in subjects like geometry.

Allow students who pass challenging courses in high school to receive diploma "designations" that would signal their credentials to colleges and future employers.

Those are among the changes that would come to Florida public schools under a sweeping education bill that received unanimous support Thursday from the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Sponsored by Legg, R-Lutz, the Career and Professional Education Act is a priority of Senate President Don Gaetz, who has championed career-based learning programs since he was a schools superintendent in Okaloosa County and has vowed to "make history" when it comes to tying the state's education system to the needs of the economy.

"This might be one of the most important pieces of legislation that we've moved forward in several years," Leon County Schools Superintendent Jackie Pons said.

"This will impact children's lives forever," State Sen. Bill Montford, D-Tallahassee, said.

The effort has the backing of business groups and educators, whose support was on display Thursday at the Godby High School Media Center. Pons and Montford joined Florida Chamber of Commerce CEO Mark Wilson and [Tallahassee Community College](#) President Jim Murdaugh to discuss the importance of career education programs.

Wilson said business groups are "fired up" about the legislation because companies and industries often choose their locations based on the talent supply in different parts of the world.

"A sixth-grader might not know what they want to be when they grow up, but parents and kids and counselors and teachers need to be able to know early: What are the in-demand skills and jobs going to be?" he said.

Godby boasts career education programs with specialties in finance, engineering and information technology. Principal Shelly Bell said she expects students to earn up more than 300 industry-level credentials by the time the school year is over. Nearby, Griffin Middle School also has a growing program where students have already earned dozens of professional-grade certificates in Microsoft Office applications.

The Florida Department of Education has already approved hundreds of career education programs, which allow students to receive industry-approved credentials that range from software certifications to credentials that enable some Godby students to prepare their neighbors' taxes. Montford said expanding the programs would help students in the job market, whether they are bound for college or not.

Pons said he wants to make career education programs available to more students, both by allowing children to move to schools that already offer them, and by adding new programs on other campuses.

"What we'll have to do is take a look at all of our industry-level certifications and see how we can expand them, choice-wise at schools and also in school communities," he said.

Under the Senate's plan, school districts would have a financial incentive to do so, because both teachers and schools could receive cash bonuses based on the number of their students who receive industry level certifications. For teachers whose students earn passing grades in the courses, the bonuses would be capped at \$2,000 each year.

The expansion of career education has been tied to broader changes to high school graduation requirements in competing proposals advanced by both House and Senate.

Career education bill would ease testing requirements for high school graduation...

continued

Right now, students must pass the geometry exam to graduate under a law passed in 2010, which took full effect this year. Legg, the Senate's Education chairman, said that "perhaps in our zeal to raise standards" lawmakers had created "artificial roadblocks to success" by making more of the end-of-course exams mandatory for would-be graduates.

Under the Senate's bill, end-of-course exams would count for 30 percent of students' grades in classes other than tenth-grade English and Algebra I, where the exams would remain mandatory.

The bill would also allow students who pass end-of-course exams in Algebra II and pass courses like physics or statistics to receive a "scholar" designation on their high school diploma. Students who receive college credits tied to industry standards could be designated "gold scholars."

Legg, Montford and others assured their colleagues that the graduation requirements would remain uniform, that any student could pursue the new diploma designations based on their coursework, and all high school graduates would still receive a standard diploma that would allow them to continue to college, whether their diploma came with a "scholar" designation or not.

"The coursework is the same," Legg said. "The requirements are still the same. But what we wanted to do is provide an option for those kids who really want to excel and to be recognized."

The panel accepted the changes and approved the new bill unanimously. It is now scheduled for a vote next week by the full Senate, and is closer to a compromise with the House.

High notes of praise for SEF 17th music education fundraiser

MARIANNE HERNANDEZ

The Tallahassee Automobile Museum was packed with supporters of music and education, on Saturday night, Feb. 23 from 6-10 p.m. From the start the inclement weather did not dampen spirits as the music of Southern Satisfaction band kicked into high gear.

The Mardi Gras theme was evident, as the room décor was decadent with splashes of purple and green. The guests arrived for the black-tie affair in full array, with colorful masks, feathers and beads. The photographer was busy capturing the festive gala, and memories of a grand night.

Music education for the youth of North Florida and Southern Georgia are at the heart of Stubbs' Educational Foundation (SEF) and its supporters. This non-profit community organization provides music scholarships for youth K-12. SEF also supports local education, and provides educational scholarships to [Tallahassee Community College](#). March is the month to apply for the [TCC](#) scholarships, and May 1 to May 31 for the music education scholarships.

Alicia New, Mistress of Ceremonies was a lively addition to the gala this year. The guests dined on the savory Cajun cuisine catered by Blue Water Cooking Company. SEF's Variety Extravaganza (VE) is known for its wonderful Silent Auction, where an array of baskets and items has been generously donated by the community to raise funds for our youth. Gina Marie Senters and Alexandra Campbell were instrumental in helping to raise fun (and funds) with the 50/50 raffle.

Special recognition was given for establishment of The Bruce Rivers Hall Guitar Scholarship endowment, in honored memory of Bruce Rivers Hall. Bruce was a family man, whose friends, fans, and band members, loved his gifts of art and music. This endowment has become the 27th endowment for SEF.

The Variety Extravaganza (VE) 2013 was dedicated in honor and memory of Michele Cooper Fijman. Michele was a volunteer for SEF for 13 years and served as a member of the Board since 2006 and as a Chairperson for the Variety Extravaganza and Silent Auction. Michele's love of music was a deep part of her life. Her desire reflected SEF's, where all might have the opportunity to understand the universal language of music.

Development Director Marianne Hernandez and one of SEF's valued volunteers, Darlene Amnott presented Executive Director Martha Stubbs with 2 dozen roses. Acknowledgement was given in recognition of Ron and Martha Stubbs' dream of meeting the music educational needs of children, giving birth to SEF 17 years ago. Thus far, 600 music scholarships have been awarded, valued at \$505, 104.14.

Guests were challenged to become a "Dream Maker", which gives a fostering opportunity, to underwrite one scholarship for one child. Music is a door that can elevate self-esteem, confidence and discipline. For others it is the spark that lights a passion that will kindle a love of music which can become a vocation and a better quality of life.

Events and performances coming up about town

Elizabeth M. Mack

Spring brings a burst of activity to Tallahassee. And there's so much going on about town right now, I couldn't make up my mind when it came time to write this column.

To start, one of my favorite plays — "The Color Purple" — is being performed at my alma mater, Florida A&M University. The play is a musical adaptation of Alice Walker's award-winning novel. For me, it's a moving story highlighting the trials of the southern black women from the past, but still holds relevance to the struggles women face in today's society. Performances began Friday and continue through this afternoon. But if you can't make it, there's nothing to fear, because a second opportunity comes next weekend with more performances scheduled for Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Another performance I'm looking forward to is "FAME-The Musical," which is being done by Theatre **TCC!** at **Tallahassee Community College**. I became familiar with FAME after seeing the 1980 version of the film in middle school — which was in the '90s. I practically watched it on repeat to the point where I was singing and dancing along with the characters in the movie. I've never seen it performed on stage, but I have a feeling I will love it equally. Performances start Thursday evening at 8 p.m. and continue through Saturday. More performances will follow April 11-13, also at 8 p.m.

And I would be totally remiss if I didn't bring up First Friday's at Railroad Square Art Park and Springtime Tallahassee.

First Fridays at Railroad Square was one of the first community activities I participated in at my leisure. I suppose that's why I will also be drawn to it. But I'm sure it's also because I love seeing all the art, stopping in at the quirky shops and discovering some great fashion finds, among other items, at some of the vendor tables. I also really love being in the diverse atmosphere. It's one of those things that makes me happy to call Tallahassee home.

And the same goes for Springtime Tallahassee. This, the 45th annual festival, starts with a Downtown GetDown on Friday night and continues with a huge downtown festival and parade on Saturday. Thousands of people crowd the streets for the parade — which is my favorite of the year, second only to the FAMU homecoming parade, because nothing beats family and old friends coming together to celebrate more than a century's worth of history.

It's an exciting time in Tallahassee right now. And there's only more to come as we move into summer, so I hope to see you all out and about town.

Our Opinion: TCC makes gains for Wakulla institute

Tallahassee Community College has made a solid move toward creating a world-class program with the purchase of land to build its Wakulla Environmental Institute.

The purchase strengthens a partnership among the college, the county and the Legislature, which last year approved \$4.5 million to help **TCC** get the institute off the ground.

This is a great example of how important our centers of higher education are to this region. With its expertise in academics and national contacts, **TCC** is putting its signature on Wakulla County, a community that will greatly benefit from having such a high-profile academic center. The center not only will provide a base for research and academic study that benefits Wakulla County students and those living nearby, but it also has the potential to bring in much needed jobs, increased opportunities for tourism and other means of economic development.

TCC agreed this week to purchase 158 acres on U.S. 319, south of Crawfordville, for the institute. Bob Ballard, the director of the institute, says the land fits the college's requirements.

Earlier this year, **TCC** administrators called the creation of the institute a "game changer" for Wakulla County. But a major part of that mission is the natural beauty and resources that Wakulla County already offers in Wakulla Springs and the St. Marks Wildlife Refuge. The area is listed by the Nature Conservancy as one of the top regions in North America for biodiversity.

TCC already offers an associate degree in environmental science technology and has begun offering classes in Wakulla County, where it has operated a satellite campus. The institute will be housed separately on the newly purchased property.

The goal is to provide students with the skills they need to pursue jobs with water management districts and other environmental entities, as well as prepare them for further academic studies.

Tallahassee Community College has been instrumental in broadening its base from its primary campus on Appleyard Drive, by bringing satellite programs to both Gadsden and Wakulla counties. Its Florida Public Safety Institute in Midway has earned a state and national reputation.

It is because of **TCC's** track record in identifying projects that provide job training and economic development that we encourage continued substantial funding from the Legislature to keep the Wakulla project on track.

TCC is on track for major Wakulla project

Doug Blackburn

An official groundbreaking for [Tallahassee Community College's](#) Wakulla Environmental Institute is scheduled for April 15, keeping the college's major project right on schedule.

Officials at [TCC](#) have said that the center is expected to create as many as 950 permanent, private-industry jobs in Wakulla County.

[TCC](#) completed purchase on Monday of 158 acres on Highway 319, a little more than three miles south of Crawfordville. The first building — the center's headquarters — should be completed in summer 2014.

[TCC](#) received \$4.5 million from the state last year to establish the Wakulla Environmental Institute, an educational facility that will also promote tourism. The college used \$382,000 of that money to buy four parcels of land from Kevin and Kerry Gaby, which county commissioners approved rezoning from agricultural to public use.

"This is a huge step forward for the college, and it's truly unique as well because the land we are acquiring isn't just a place to build classrooms — the natural space of Wakulla is the classroom," [TCC](#) President Jim Murdaugh said. "That is what will make the institute so special, the combination of [TCC's](#) strong academic tradition with the biodiversity and natural resources of Wakulla."

This semester, even before acquiring the land for the institute, [TCC](#) began offering the first classes for a water quality technician certificate and an associate's degree in environmental science technology.

The college is soliciting bids for an architect for the headquarters, said Bob Ballard, director of the Wakulla Environmental Institute. It will house a laboratory, three classrooms and office space in a traditional Florida Cracker-style building.

"This building has to be all things to all people, because it's the first," Ballard said. "We're not sure when the next building will be built, so this one has to be versatile."

In the meantime, the college will begin building a road from 4020 Highway 319 to the site of the institute's proposed headquarters, get utilities set up and connect with the county sewer line, Ballard said.

"There is a lot of preliminary work that can be done before we get to bricks and mortar," he said.

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Legislature poised to deliver funds to cash-strapped state universities

Legislature poised to deliver an infusion to cash-strapped universities

DEMOCRAT SENIOR WRITER

The Marching Chiefs and other ambassadors for Florida State University turned out en masse Tuesday for FSU Day at the Capitol. Florida A&M University alumni are hoping for a similar buzz next Thursday, when they host their annual event with legislators.

In truth, though, as the Legislature marks the midway point of its 60-day session, FSU, FAMU, University of Florida and the rest of the state's institutions of higher education have been basking in the spotlight almost from day one.

After six straight years of budget cuts, Florida's universities are on target to receive an infusion of new revenue. And, save a proposal in the House to increase tuition by 6 percent, there is little difference between either chamber or the governor.

"This is an opportunity for some innovation, and I think with the message from the governor about advancing higher education, this is a sign that the state of Florida is growing again and the universities can participate in the growth by doing things that support the economy of the state," FSU President Eric Barron said. "There is a sense of optimism."

There is also a sense of relief at the state's universities. The preliminary budgets in both the House and Senate would return \$300 million to the State University System with no strings attached, money that was removed late in the 2012 legislative session. That means \$65 million would come back to FSU, almost \$20 million to FAMU.

"That is critical," FAMU interim President Larry Robinson said. "I'm not sure what we would do if we don't have that money returned."

Both chambers are working on preeminence legislation similar to the bill that the Legislature approved last year, only to have it vetoed by Gov. Rick Scott. The preeminence bills, which would establish criteria for elevating the state's top performing universities — UF and FSU are the only two that qualify — would provide extra funding for those institutions.

But the 2013 versions of the preeminence legislation differ in one significant way from the 2012 bill: They do not include the ability to raise tuition, which the governor is adamantly opposed to doing, as a funding source.

The preeminence legislation in the House is part of an omnibus bill (HB 7057) that features \$12.5 million in recurring money for FSU and \$15 million for UF for each to climb in the national rankings, plus an additional \$15 million (\$10 million is non-recurring) for UF to establish an online institution.

The Senate's preeminence legislation (SB 1720) would provide \$15 million each for FSU and UF in recurring funds. The Senate is expected to take up online learning in a separate bill.

"There's nothing like having a little money to govern. I think we've funded higher education probably higher than anybody expected," said Sen. John Thrasher, R-Jacksonville and a member of the appropriations committee.

"I think we all agree that we have to link our growth in jobs, good jobs, to higher education. They're the ultimate platform to get a person into a good quality job."

Tallahassee Community College and the other 27 schools in the State College System have not been cut to the same extent as Florida's universities, but they aren't on track to receive nearly the same increase in funding, according to the preliminary budgets in the House and Senate. **TCC's** \$23 million operating budget would go up by less than \$200,000 in the House budget, while the Senate would increase the college's funding by more than \$1 million.

TCC President Jim Murdaugh said the college is preparing a budget with no increase in funding, even though some new money is expected.

"There's still a lot to nail down," Murdaugh said. "I'm optimistic **TCC** and the system will be better off this year than last year. I believe there will be additional state funds — I just don't know how much."

In addition to preeminence legislation for the state's universities, the budgets in both the House and Senate would give substantial new revenue for the operating budgets at all of the institutions, with little difference between the two chambers. FSU would increase from \$215 million to \$242 million, while FAMU would climb from \$72 million to \$81 million.

Legislature poised to deliver funds to cash-strapped state universities...

continued

For building projects, addressed only in the House at this point, FSU would receive a little more than \$23 million to renovate Oglesby Student Union plus \$10 million in Public Education Capital Outlay funds for general building maintenance. FAMU would get \$8.6 million to expand its student union plus \$4 million in PECO to add on to its new pharmacy building.

Rep. Alan Williams, D-Tallahassee and a member of the appropriations committee, describes himself as a strong supporter of higher education. But he cautioned that a lot can happen between now and the end of session.

"I think all options are on the table as it relates to funding higher education. When we have a surplus, we have to do all we can to fund appropriately," he said.

Williams voted for the House's preeminence bill last year, and said he supports Barron's plan for taking FSU from No. 42 to a top 25 ranking among the nation's public universities, but he also said he has concerns about making the state's top two universities too exclusive.

"What I don't want us to do is indirectly cause these universities to become less and less diverse," Williams said.

"I think if anything we want them to be as diverse as possible. They need to be reflective of the state of Florida."

Have fun going Wild About Wakulla

Bonnie Holub

Remember as a child when you cried, "I'm bored. There's nothing to do." And your mother replied, "Go outside and play. There's all kinds of things to do."

Well, even now, as grown-ups, when daily life gets too repetitious, we may wish for someone to find us something new to do. And if that's the case, I have a suggestion, similar to what Mom would say. Go outside ... to Wakulla County ... and play. There are all kinds of things to do during Wild About Wakulla Week, April 12 – 21.

For starters, how about a clay sculpture experience. Play in clay like you did in kindergarten, although with the guidance of a professional clay artist. Nancy Jefferson shows you how she uses nature to inspire her creations as she guides you in creating a tangible inspiration of your own.

All materials are supplied, and final pieces are fired and shipped to you as a reminder of your clay play day. The workshop is April 12 at the Wakulla Welcome Center in Panacea, overlooking Dickerson Bay, where your muse awaits.

The Wakulla Welcome Center also serves as the event's Hospitality Hub where hosts will be on hand to welcome you and provide area maps and information about attractions, restaurants and tours.

After exercising your artistic skills, you may want to exercise the rest of your being by participating in The Worm Grunter's 5K Run on April 13. The run kicks off the 13th annual Worm Gruntin' Festival in Sopchoppy. During the festival, you can learn how to grunt worms, a new experience for most and test your skills at horseshoes, hula-hoop and worm-grunting contests.

On April 14, St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge is offering a rare opportunity for an evening visit to the St. Marks Lighthouse. On the Lantern Tour you will learn about 19th Century lighthouse keepers and hear tales of the great storms and heroic actions that occurred on the spot.

An out of this world opportunity exists on the guided cemetery tour on April 19. Learn about those who paved the way for today's communities long before Wakulla's communities were paved.

On this tour, sponsored by the Wakulla County Historical Society, you will hear about the county's forebears, and maybe even your own ancestors, when you visit the

Whaley, Raker, Whiddon Lake, Zion Hill, Pearce, Dismal Sink, Smith on Bloxham and Wakulla cemeteries.

For theater-lovers, the Wakulla Volcano production may fit your playbill. Palaver Tree Theater Company will perform the mystery drama in the historic Sopchoppy auditorium on April 19.

Continuous adventures during the week, often led by **Tallahassee Community College** certified Green Guides, include guided trail rides, scenic boat tours, saltwater fishing charters, kayak tours and an exploration of the sinks of Wakulla, which includes a cheese and fruit picnic. Nice.

So you like to dance. Two dances are planned during the week-long plus event, the Worm Grunter's Ball, under the stars in Sopchoppy, and the Traditions Dinner Dance at the Wakulla Springs Lodge featuring the Tallahassee Swing Band. The Traditions Dinner Dance tops off the day at the annual Wakulla Wildlife Festival at Wakulla Springs State Park on April 20.

The Wakulla Wildlife Festival offers its usual, and unusual, array of tours from the Sunrise Serenity boat tour to the Evening Light Photography boat tour, with an art show, guided tours, walks and music to fill the hours in between.

The Sopchoppy Worm Gruntin' Festival at the beginning of the week and the Wakulla Wildlife Festival at the end of the week offer food, vendors and activities for all ages throughout the day.

To close out the Wild About Wakulla festivities, live jazz will play through the afternoon and into the evening on April 21 at the Sweet Magnolia Inn in St. Marks.

Sit a spell on the front porch of this historic bed and breakfast with a glass of homemade sangria, listen to the music and relax after Wild About Wakulla Week and all the things there were to do.

Fees apply and reservations are needed for some of the tours and activities. For a daily listing of all activities, dates, times and fees, visit www.wildaboutwakulla.com.

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