

COLLEGE OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

SUMMER 2025

# CONNECTION



## ART FOR SCIENCE

*Collaborative  
creations*

## PURE MAGIC

*Sold-out  
spring musical*

## HIGH-TECH SUCCESS

*Alumnus is city's  
top IT pro*



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CF students Xavier Rosado and Giovanni Jiminez starred in “Roald Dahl’s Willy Wonka.”

Have a CF story to tell?



Scan the code for consideration in our next issue!



Dr. Jim Henningsen, CF president, with nursing students from the Wilton Simpson Citrus Campus

Collaboration is the key to our success at the College of Central Florida. Our strength is evident in the way our faculty and staff work together every day to empower and engage our students and ensure they excel. As a college, we depend on partnerships to maintain alignment between our educational opportunities and the workforce needs of local employers.

In this issue, you’ll read about how collaboration among our visual and performing arts departments put our students in the center-stage spotlight for an unprecedented sold-out run of our spring musical production. You’ll go behind the scenes to learn how more than a year of determination by a student at the Jack Wilkinson Levy Campus earned his work a place of honor in the newest building on our Ocala Campus.

You’ll get an inside look at all the ways our students, faculty and staff are achieving excellence on campus, in our communities and beyond.

Thank you for joining us to celebrate our successes and partnering with us as we continue our journey to transform lives as our region’s first choice for quality higher education.

James D. Henningsen, Ed.D., CF President

*We transform lives and enrich our community by providing a supportive, high-quality learning environment that prepares individuals to excel in work and life.*

Connection magazine is published twice each year by the College of Central Florida for alumni and friends of the college. The magazine’s editorial staff strives to inform, engage and inspire readers through stories about the college’s contributions to the community.

College of Central Florida offers equal access and opportunity in employment, admissions and educational activities. The college will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnicity, religion, sex, age, marital status, national origin, genetic information, veteran status or disability status and any other factors prohibited under applicable federal, state, and local civil rights laws and regulations in its employment practices or in the admission and treatment of students. Recognizing that sexual harassment constitutes discrimination on the basis of sex and violates this policy statement, the college will not tolerate such conduct. The Title IX Coordinator has been designated to handle inquiries regarding nondiscrimination policies and can be contacted at the Ocala Campus, 3001 S.W. College Road, at 352-291-4410 or Compliance@cf.edu.



Congratulations!

CF student Keltavia Richardson was one of a record number of graduates – 668 – who attended commencement ceremonies on May 9.



# Pure Magic

**Unprecedented interdepartmental collaboration created a sold-out, spectacular success.**

From the moment the curtain opened to reveal the iconic Willy Wonka, resplendent in a regal purple top hat and gold-trimmed tails, singing “Pure Imagination,” CF’s spring musical captivated theatergoers with pure magic.

For audiences at the four sold-out performances April 3-6, the harmony extended far beyond the 24 musical numbers. The delightful synergism that radiated from the stage could only be achieved with months of hard work, and in fact, this indisputably successful show was the result of an unprecedented, semester-long collaboration between four Visual and Performing Arts departments: theatre, music, dance and digital media.

The 2025 spring musical, “Roald Dahl’s Willy Wonka,” was selected by Nonalee Davis, CF assistant professor of theatre and the show’s director, who reimagined the whimsical world of fiction’s favorite chocolatier with a fantastical, futuristic, steampunk aesthetic. And the show’s gear-driven, color-drenched industrial set was just a backdrop to highlight 30

exuberant students in the cast, who acted, sang and performed original choreography and stunts. Cast members were selected after auditioning the last week of the fall semester, and they spent four afternoons a week in Davis’ Advanced Play Production class, learning the play inside and out, developing their characters, creating the set, and inventing special effects.

“The 50 talented students involved in this extraordinary show had the time of their lives,” Davis said. “By staging this show with a steampunk approach, we were able to bring a contemporary flair and a sense of otherworldly magic that reinvented the tale for modern audiences while maintaining its whimsical heart. The result was an unforgettable blending of entertainment and education – in the most exciting way possible.”



From left: CF students Hunter Leary as Grandpa Joe, Geovanni Jimenez as Charlie Bucket and Xavier Rosado as Willy Wonka

The seven Oompa Loompas, reimagined as robots brought to life from the mystical mind of Wonka himself, spent 5 ½ hours a week in Musical Theatre Dance, a new class offered in the Spring 2025 semester to give the show’s featured dancers and stunts plenty of preparation with dance instructor Justine McDaniel, the musical’s choreographer.

“It was really fun to be able to explore and really dive into the different movement patterns,” McDaniel said. “So I felt like I really got to know the students and we got to craft things together. It also allowed for the process to be a little experimental, which I really enjoyed as a choreographer. There were definitely a lot of ‘wow’ moments ... a lot of fun use of props with movement for the dancers.”

Vocal music students had the chance to shine on stage, and the 11 student musicians who provided live accompaniment on instruments ranging from flute and clarinet to trombone and percussion got valuable experience playing in a pit orchestra.

“It’s really a different experience than the normal opportunities they have in the music department,” explained Dr. Jason Longtin, CF professor of music and the show’s musical director. “In this case, they were supporting the action on stage rather than just performing the songs as written. For a lot of these students, this was their first time in a pit orchestra, so it was a very unique and new experience. I also think it’s really valuable because this is where a lot of the jobs are for our instrumentalists, finding pit orchestras to play in. So this is a great opportunity, because a lot of them will probably be doing this quite often in their careers.”

Plus, Longtin noted, “the music is just a lot of fun.”

“The students had a good time with it, because it’s a blast to sing,” he continued. “The tunes are catchy. They were able to kind of relax and find their characters because they connected to the music so quickly.”

The steampunk aesthetic was reflected through the set’s chocolate factory, with its gadgets, gears and candy machine mechanics, down to the most minute details on the characters’ costumes – from the Victorian aviator goggles atop Willy Wonka’s top hat to the Oompa Loompas’ ornate, bronze half masks to the tiny metallic gears emblazoned on Charlie’s suspenders and Grandpa Joe’s lapels.

The elaborate costumes were designed by Abigail Stallings, CF assistant professor of digital media.

“We decided as a design team that we wanted to steampunk the show,” Stallings remembered. “What’s neat about steampunk



CF students Ysabella Duran and Kate Hough as Oompa Loompas

is there’s no real time period – it’s a mix of Victorian elements but it’s also got this inventive, futuristic feel and it adds to the whimsy. It created this unique world for the characters, emphasized through the steampunk elements. And I wanted to have some tribute to the original iconic renditions of Wonka and ‘Charlie and the Chocolate Factory,’ especially the original movie with all of its magical elements.”

“Willy Wonka” was her “most challenging show to costume yet,” Stallings said, but added it was also “really fun.”

“There was a lot of love put into these costumes,” she recalled. “A lot of hand-sewn-on gears and painting elements created this other world, building on the fantastical world of Wonka.”

CF student Xavier Rosado, who played Willy Wonka, knew audiences would love the show’s playfulness. Hunter Leary, a CF student who played Grandpa Joe, said the show’s “strongest characteristic” was “its spectacle.” But it was Geovanni Jimenez, who portrayed the endearing, youthful Charlie Bucket, who accurately predicted how audiences would react: “I think they’re going to love everything!”

***“We were able to bring a contemporary flair and a sense of otherworldly magic that reinvented the tale for modern audiences while maintaining its whimsical heart.”***

-DAVIS



From left: CF students Mikey Snow, Elias Alicea, Kayla Stevens, Geovanni Jimenez, Hunter Leary, La’Nya Solomon and Camila Bran



# Art for Science

**Collaboration across three campuses generated unique art for CF's newest health sciences center.**

Lucas Smith doesn't consider himself an artist. A welder, absolutely. Marine mechanic? For sure. A CF graduate, yes! (As of May 9.) But with his creation now permanently displayed in a prominent location in the college's newest and most modern learning space, Smith has turned the CF logo into a bona fide work of art.

The idea for the first-ever partnership between the nursing and welding technology programs came with providential timing: the new AdventHealth Center for Nursing had just opened on the CF Ocala Campus in January, and, at the Jack Wilkinson Levy Campus, Smith, a student in the CF Advanced Welding Technology Career and Technical Certificate program had just gotten the computer numerical control (CNC) machine back up and running after being out of service for multiple semesters.

As college administrators toured through the new home of the CF Debbie Ressler Nursing Program, they considered art selections to

enhance the space as well as an opportunity to include the CF brand.

"Do you think our welding students could produce a CF logo?" they wondered.

The answer was a resounding "yes!" and the timing could not have been more synchronous.



CF student Lucas Smith with the logo he welded at the Jack Wilkinson Levy Campus

"They asked me if we could cut out a sign," remembered James Class, CF associate professor of welding. "The CNC machine had been down for almost two years. This young man, Lucas, had been working with the software company for more than a year and a half, getting it programmed and back up and running."

Smith, who started at CF as a dual enrollment student in 2022, was thrilled to have an inaugural project to test out the machine he'd worked so hard to get back online.



***"This truly is a state-of-the-art building, and all our partners who contributed to this project have enabled us to dream big."***

-CORTES

"I saved the school logo and uploaded it to the software," Smith said, explaining that the letters O and D in the words College of Central Florida required an extra challenge – using a technique called bridging that requires the welder to digitally draw lines in the project's computer-aided design software so the plasma cutter can connect the insides of the letters, which otherwise would fall out.

"I enjoyed it," Smith said of his very first CNC project, calling it "an honor."

"I feel special that I was able to contribute something," he continued. "I think the

welding program is a great program."

The bright, shiny logo is just one of many decorative touches that add some CF character to the high-tech building, with its state-of-the-art classrooms, labs and exam simulation rooms. The two-story facility's long, bright corridors were the perfect backdrop to display artworks from the college's permanent art collection, noted Tyrus Clutter, CF professor of art.

"Art is for everyone," Clutter said. "And it's been proven over time how important the arts can be for people who go into medicine. Art is a great tool – there are many ways you can enjoy it, and, in an educational setting, I think it's really good for people. It's analytical thinking, just being able to look at art and think, 'Why is that there?' It's critical thinking and it's useful in any area."

The artworks that adorn the walls in the AdventHealth Center for Nursing were selected in cooperation with the Appleton Museum of Art's director and assistant director. The colorful, abstract prints from the Appleton's collection were selected to enhance the space, said Jason Steuber, Appleton director.

"The Appleton is proud to serve as a resource across all CF campuses," he said. "Our team enjoys the opportunity to help beautify campus environments for students, staff and visitors. These collaborations also allow us to share the Appleton collection in fresh, meaningful ways beyond the museum walls."

For Appleton staff, coordinating the unique display for the nursing building's lobby was especially enjoyable.



Mannequins in the AdventHealth Center for Nursing display a vintage nurse's uniform alongside modern attire.

"To visually highlight the program's evolution, we thought it would be fun to display a vintage nursing uniform from the college archives alongside the modern scrubs and lab coats worn by students today – a visually striking tribute to where the program began and how far it has come," Steuber said. "We had the silver, futuristic mannequins on hand, purchased for the museum's major Art Deco exhibition in 2023. We thought they would make excellent visual anchors in the airy space and contrasted nicely with the mid-century aesthetic of the architecture. On a deeper level, we felt that the metallic mannequins were symbolic in that they not only reflect the student journey, from past to present, but that students could 'see themselves' as part of the legacy."

"In nursing, said Dr. Stephanie Cortes, CF associate vice president of health sciences, "it's never a team of one; it's always a team of many."

"This truly is a state-of-the-art building," she continued, "and all our partners who contributed to this project have enabled us to dream big."



CF graduate Jackson Johns in the AdventHealth Center for Nursing



# Achieving Excellence

Engaged students, faculty and staff excel on our campuses, in our communities and beyond.

## CF Launches New University of Florida Transfer Partnership

CF now is offering students the **Going Gator** partnership, designed for learners who want to earn an Associate in Arts degree at CF and then have guaranteed admission to transfer to the University of Florida.

Through the Going Gator program, qualifying students can select 19 pathways in the UF College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, from English to history to sciences and more. Once admitted to the Going Gator program, CF students must continue to meet the eligibility criteria such as good academic standing and progress in their selected academic pathway. As a top public university, UF's admission process is highly competitive, and this partnership ensures CF graduates have a clear path to attaining that top-tier education.

## Florida Department of Education Awards Scholarship Funds

Thanks to funding by the Florida Legislature, the Florida Department of Education has awarded CF \$1,967,027 in Open Door scholarship funding for the 2024-2025 academic year to support students in career and technical programs. Students enrolled in eligible Associate in Science degree and non-degree programs have received scholarships this year, helping them move more quickly toward completing their education in high-demand occupations.

## Association of Florida Colleges Honors CF

The CF Chapter of the Association of Florida Colleges (AFC) was honored at the AFC Leadership Summit in January, where members **Erina Gross**, CF student activities and outreach coordinator, and **Alicia Harrison**, CF educational advisor, graduated from the Florida Certified College Professionals program. The college earned distinction as a 2024 Platinum Chapter.



CF graduate Diana Marlita

## Students Recognized by Florida College System

Students in the music and theatre programs as well as publications staff were recognized as students of the month by the Florida College System in the 2024-2025 academic year.

**Emerson Kirkland**, a theatre student and president of the Performing Arts Club, was the Florida College System Activities Association (FCSAA) Theatre Student of the Month in January. As stage manager for "Willy Wonka" and five previous productions, she was described as "the go-to technical theatre student at CF."

**Mikey Snow**, who is studying music education, was the FCSAA Music Student of the Month in September 2024. Active in both the Patriot Singers and the Jazz Band, Snow served as the choral librarian for the department and recently appeared as Mike Teavee in the CF production of "Willy Wonka."

**Autumn Stoner**, the principal chair flutist for the Wind Symphony and lead alto saxophonist for the jazz ensemble, was the FCSAA Music Student of the Month for October 2024. She is studying music performance and education and hopes to work as a professional flute player and teach at the collegiate level.

**Allen Venezia Jr.**, the lead trumpet player for both the Wind Symphony and jazz ensemble, was the FCSAA Music Student of the Month for January. He also plays in the Minutemen Brass Quartet and performed a flugelhorn solo in the fall brass recital. Venezia is an Associate in Arts student who plans to go on to earn a bachelor of music degree specializing in trumpet performance.

**Thomas Reed**, managing editor of the Patriot Press, was the FCSPA Student of the Month in October 2024. Previously a staff writer who also took many photos for the newspaper, Reed was promoted to editor and helps other student develop their content. He led the development of an opening video for the 2024 FCSPA state conference.



From left: Dr. Mike Bosley, FCSAA executive committee chair, and Marjorie McGee, CF director of student life

## Staff Inducted into State Hall of Fame

In April, the Florida College System Activities Association (FCSAA) inducted **Marjorie McGee**, CF director of student life, and **Dr. James Meier**, CF professor of humanities, into the FCSAA Hall of Fame. The FCSAA is the statewide association that regulates, coordinates and promotes intercollegiate activities for the Florida College System. The Hall of Fame recognizes individuals who have distinguished themselves with outstanding achievement and excellence in one or more FCSAA divisions.

McGee has served on the FCSAA executive committee and in many statewide roles throughout her 19 years at CF. She was nominated by former students, including Jackie Beard, who noted "she is a champion for enriching student life experiences and a testament to the commitment of dedicated service."

Meier began teaching at CF in 2007 and soon became a co-coach for the Brain Bowl team, through which he has worked with more than 125 student participants, leading CF to qualify for both the national Community College Championship Tournament and the Intercollegiate Championship Tournament. He was nominated for the Hall of Fame by his current co-coaches, Dana Harris and Melissa Quigley.

## Welding Takes the Spotlight

The CF Welding Technology program, offered exclusively at the Jack Wilkinson Levy Campus, hosted two regional industry events during the 2024-2025 academic year.

On Oct. 29, 2024, CF hosted the American Welding Society competition for the third consecutive year. Attendees from nine regional schools, including CF, competed for top honors at this event sponsored by Alien

Engineered Products, Airgas, Citrus Mobile Welding and Fabrication, Crom, E-One, Edge Welding Supply, Full Penetration Welding and Fabrication, Lincoln, Red-D-Arc Welder Rentals, Tunnel Master and Weldtest Services.

In early March, CF invited welding students, graduates and prospective students to the fourth annual Welding Career Expo. More than 65 attendees had the opportunity to talk with local employers, apply and interview for jobs, get resume tips and apply to the CF Welding Technology program.

## Citrus Student Honored with Fellowship

**Michael Chaput**, a CF student ambassador at the Wilton Simpson Citrus Campus, is one of 11 students selected to participate in the Florida College Access Network (FCAN) 2024-2025 Advocacy Fellowship. In addition to participating in monthly meetings, collaborating with local leaders and developing advocacy and storytelling skills, he was invited to participate in FCAN Advocacy Days in Tallahassee in March to meet with elected officials and discuss education policies that impact our communities.

The prestigious FCAN program is designed to amplify student voices in education policy and provide opportunities for leadership development.

## Student Recognized for Bravery

CF student **Adriano Isaza** came to the rescue when he found an adjunct instructor experiencing a severe medical emergency at the CF Ocala Campus on the morning of Feb. 20. Isaza didn't hesitate to immediately seek out help. Thanks to Isaza's quick response, EMS arrived promptly to transport the instructor to the hospital, where they were admitted in critical condition and discharged after several days. Isaza was recognized at the March meeting of the District Board of Trustees for demonstrating exceptional bravery and leadership.



CF student Adriano Isaza, center, with Dr. Jim Henningsen, CF president (left), and CF trustees, from left: Bill Edgar, Rusty Branson, Charlie Stone, Joyce Brancato and Bobby Durrance





CF administrators and trustees were joined by AdventHealth President/CEO Erika Skula and Ocala Metro Chamber & Economic Partnership officials to cut the ribbon for the AdventHealth Center for Nursing on Jan. 30.

## AdventHealth Center for Nursing Opens

CF administrators, staff, faculty and nursing students gathered with hundreds of attendees from the community on Jan. 30 to celebrate the opening of the AdventHealth Center for Nursing on the Ocala Campus. The new home of the Debbie Ressler Nursing Program recognizes the \$3 million commitment from AdventHealth Ocala to the CF Foundation to support scholarship endowments and program equipment. Attendees toured the 42,500-square-foot building's six classrooms, three skills labs and six simulation rooms which now serve more than 300 students in RN and bachelor's degree programs. Construction funding came from AdventHealth Ocala, the Marion County Hospital District, the Florida Legislature, the Marion County Board of Commissioners and other community partners.

## Students Earn Honor Society Awards

Several members of the CF Kappa Nu chapter of the Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) honor society were honored at the Florida regional conference March 8-9. The chapter was recognized as a Five Star Chapter for the 17th consecutive year and was elected to serve as the 2025-2026 regional service chapter. Additionally, the chapter was honored as a REACH rewards chapter for member recruitment.

The following students won individual awards: **Brianna Cockman**, 2024 Florida Regional PTK Distinguished Chapter Member; **Lisette Koehner**, 2024 Florida

Regional PTK Nonfiction Short Story Award; and **Sofiia Scherbakova**, 2024 Florida Regional PTK Music Award and 2025 Florida Regional PTK Speech. **Yongxing Lin** and **Abigail Castillo Rodrigues** received pins for completion of the PTK Competitive Edge Program, a professional development program designed to build essential skills that are not often covered in the classroom, focusing on enhancing critical thinking, communication, collaboration and professionalism to ensure that students are well prepared for their careers and leadership roles.

## Staff Member Receives Statewide Recognition

In February, **Marissa Brown**, CF assistant director of admissions and student recruitment, was honored as the Take Stock in Children of Florida Alumni of the Year. She benefitted from the Take Stock program as a student and now volunteers as a mentor for low-income youth through the Public Education Foundation of Marion County.

## Student Newspaper Honored with State Awards

Members of the Patriot Press, CF's student news publication, earned multiple awards from the Florida State College Publications Association (FSCPA), which were awarded at the 65th Annual FSCPA Conference and Awards Banquet. Student leaders, along with faculty advisor Melissa Schuck, hosted 67 students and faculty from 10 state colleges for the conference at the Ocala Campus in November 2024.

The Patriot Press took second place awards for in-depth reporting, feature photo and

feature story, plus third place awards for news story, news photo, headlines, humor and sports writing.

## Adult Education Grads Earn Diplomas

In December, 27 hardworking adult education students received their State of Florida high school diploma at a graduation ceremony at the CF Jack Wilkinson Levy Campus. An audience of 100 guests gathered to celebrate the graduates, and Dr. Jim Henningsen, CF president, offered opening remarks.

On April 9, another five graduates earned high school diplomas through the CF Adult Education/GED program. Offered exclusively at the Jack Wilkinson Levy Campus, the program offers in-person classes in reading/writing and math plus digital resources and workforce and college transition workshops.

## Students Named to All-Florida Academic Team

This year, 11 CF students have been appointed to the 2025 Coca-Cola All-Florida Academic Team, which recognizes outstanding students for academic achievement, leadership and service to the community.

Congratulations to CF students **Julie Bartoli**, **Leigha Carmody**, **Brianna Cockman**, **Paris Cousins**, **Dayla Graham**, **Tara Hardwick**, **Joshua Jewett**, **Amanda Jobe**, **Davianka Joseph**, **Jasmine Richardson** and **Zachary Trenta**. These high achievers represent all areas of academic study, from Associate in Arts pathways to Health Sciences to bachelor's degree programs.



CF students Julie Bartoli and Jasmine Richardson



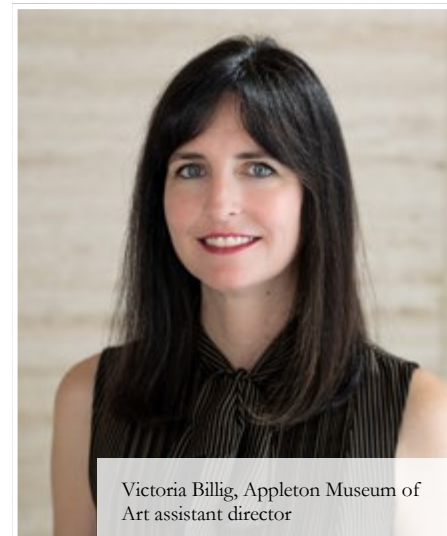
Tavis Douglass, CF associate professor and agribusiness program manager, flies a precision agriculture drone at the Vintage Farm Campus.

## Agribusiness Program Manager Obtains Drone Certification

Early this year, **Tavis Douglass**, CF associate professor and program manager for agribusiness, earned a Commercial Pesticide Applicator license with Aerial and Row Crop Application endorsements for drone use in agricultural production. This allows him to demonstrate and teach this high-tech approach to CF students and reflects our Agribusiness Management curriculum's focus on precision agriculture.

## Appleton Museum Employee Honored

**Victoria Billig**, assistant director for the Appleton Museum of Art, was honored in December 2024 with the Florida Association of Museums 2024 Exceptional Leadership Award.



Victoria Billig, Appleton Museum of Art assistant director

The award recognizes her work in the museum field and profound impact on the cultural arts, Florida's museums and the lives of Florida citizens. Billig has worked as Appleton assistant director for 11 years, leading a 15-person team and spearheading a successful American Alliance of Museums reaccreditation. Her passion is ensuring that museums and the arts are accessible resources for children and adults in all walks of life.

## CF Earns Agriculture Distinction

In late 2024, CF became one of only three Florida educational institutions to be designated by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture Non-Land-Grant College of Agriculture, alongside Florida State University and Florida International University. As the only college in the Florida College System to earn this certification, CF joins the ranks of 82 universities and just five other colleges nationwide and is eligible to apply for specific sources of federal funding to build capacity, enhance academic programs and strengthen partnerships with local businesses and organizations. CF is the only Florida state college that offers an Associate in Science degree in Agribusiness Management, and CF's Vintage Farm Campus is the only working farm campus within the Florida College System.

## Students Participate in Model United Nations

CF students **Purshia Allotey**, **Zaphaniah Archer**, **Travis Hanes** and **Tommy Sparks** traveled with advisor Dr. John Anene to participate in the Southern Regional Model United Nations conference in Charlotte,

North Carolina, in March. The students played the countries of Belarus and Hungary and were involved in the general assembly committee, addressing issues with foreign election interference and illegal mining and trafficking of precious metals. In the international telecommunication union committee, they evaluated efforts to improve internet access for schools and students in rural and remote areas as well as expanding cybersecurity to protect critical information infrastructure.

## Marketing and Public Relations Department Wins National Awards



Sarah Eshleman, CF graphic design, web and public relations coordinator

The CF Marketing and Public Relations team earned two Paragon Awards from the National Council for Marketing & Public Relations (NCMPR). CF won a bronze award for Connection magazine and a gold award for the college's digital viewbook, created by **Sarah Eshleman**, graphic design, web and public relations coordinator. The 2025 Paragon Awards, announced at the NCMPR national conference in March, drew 1,570 entries from 205 two-year colleges across the country.

## Music Students Win State Competitions

Two CF music students came home winners after the Florida College System Activities Association 2025 Student Artist Competition held in January. **Nishanth Shodavara**, a euphonium player, was the top brass player. Vocalist **Mikey Snow** won the voice category. Students from 15 Florida state colleges performed for panels of judges, competing for music scholarship awards.



# Annual Report



STEPS scholarship recipients with Chris Knife, vice president of institutional advancement and CEO of the CF Foundation

*“If you want to go fast, go alone;  
if you want to go far, go with many.”*

This well-known sentiment best sums up this past year at the CF Foundation. In fact, Dr. Henningsen refers to CF as “the partnership college,” and the CF Foundation has always been an agency that works in partnership with our donors, the community and the college to accomplish great things and to go far on this journey.

This year we celebrate our long history of partnerships – including the 20th year of our STEPS to CF program for promising fifth graders.

As you will notice in the basic balance sheet on the opposite page, 2024 was a year of significant gains as we continue to partner with the college and community to:

- Turn ownership of the Enterprise Center over to the college to meet growing office space needs as the college renovates and builds to expand critical programs
- Structure gifts from AdventHealth and the Citrus County Hospital Board to support programs and student scholarships
- Increase donor dollars for students by establishing 14 new scholarships to support a wide range of programs

All of this past year’s activity resulted in a net increase of 10% in our total assets. The CF Foundation was able to provide \$5.3 million to the college (a 26% increase over last year).

As we look to 2025, we know we will go far because of our donors who go with us to help the college provide one of the best educational and training programs in the state, if not the nation.

Thank you to all who are on this journey with us. We invite others to join us and look forward to working with everyone interested in going far.

Best regards,

Christopher R. Knife, *Vice President of Institutional Advancement and CEO of the CF Foundation*



Bernard “Bernie” L. Little Jr.

## STEPS to CF Turns 20

Scholarships Taking Elementary Promising Students (STEPS) to CF is a scholarship program that presents awards to promising fifth grade students at every public elementary school in Citrus, Levy and Marion counties and the Boys and Girls Club of Marion County.

The program began in 2005 with three initial scholarships funded by community leader and CF trustee Bernard “Bernie” L. Little Jr. With many new donors adding their support, in 2025, 106 scholarships were awarded for students to use upon successful completion of high school. Over its 20-year history, STEPS has awarded 1,479 scholarships.

“STEPS is a fantastic program that provides great incentive for deserving fifth grade students to study hard and finish strong so that they can take their next steps at the College of Central Florida,” said Chris Knife, vice president of development and CEO of the CF Foundation.

To learn more, visit [CF.edu/Steps](https://CF.edu/Steps) or contact Traci Mason, [masont@cf.edu](mailto:masont@cf.edu) or 352-873-5808.

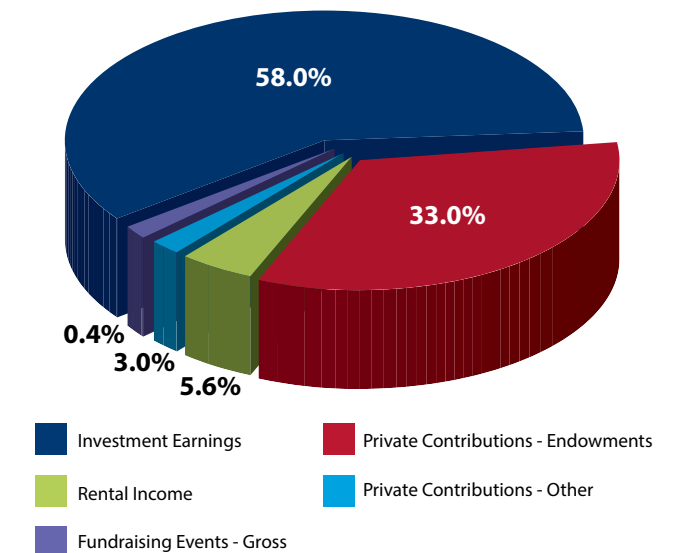


ASSETS	
Current Assets	
Cash and Investments	\$6,154,489
Other Current Assets	183,220
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>\$6,337,709</b>
Non-Current Assets	
The Appleton Museum	\$19,398,255
Other Property and Equipment	368,052
College Square Residence	4,377,649
Enterprise Center	1,250
Less Accumulated Amortization	(63,170)
Less Accumulated Depreciation	(2,597,269)
Investments - Endowed	111,055,175
Investments - Restricted	2,874,421
Pledges Receivable	39,931
Subscription - Right to Use	84,226
<b>Total Non-Current Assets</b>	<b>\$135,538,521</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$141,876,230</b>
LIABILITIES	
Current Liabilities	
Current Liabilities	\$803,919
<b>Total Current Liabilities</b>	<b>\$803,919</b>
Long-Term Liabilities*	
Other Long-Term Liabilities	\$18,706
<b>Total Long-Term Liabilities</b>	<b>\$18,706</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	<b>\$822,626</b>
DEFERRED INFLOWS OF RESOURCES	
	\$106,521
NET ASSETS	
Operating Fund - Unrestricted	\$5,323,408
Operating Fund - Restricted	3,200,269
Non-Expendable Endowed	110,197,076
General Plant	19,420,456
Student Housing	2,755,874
Enterprise Center	50,000
<b>TOTAL NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$140,947,083</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$141,876,230</b>

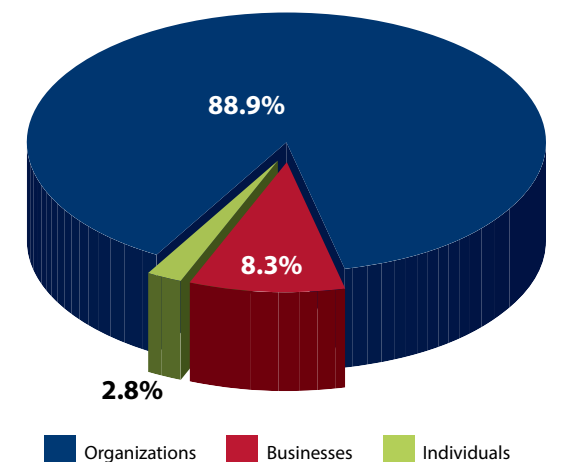
\*Due to GASB 96, Subscription-Based IT Arrangements are now included

Unaudited at Dec. 31, 2024

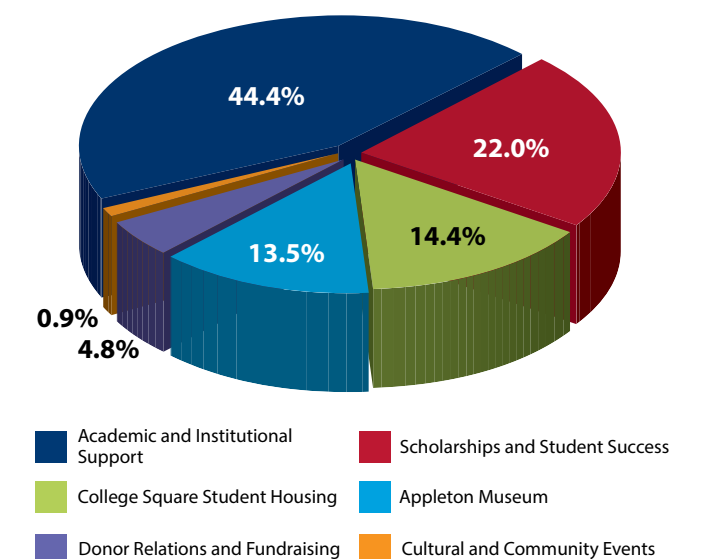
## 2024 Sources of Revenue (\$19,261,476)



## 2024 Sources of Contributions (\$7,058,285)



## 2024 Support to the College and Community (\$5,309,121)





# Flavors from Florida

An enchanting evening with an Old Florida aesthetic raised serious scholarship dollars.



From left: Charlie Stone, CF board of trustees vice chair; Ben Marciano, Ocala mayor; Greg Harrell, Marion County clerk of court; and Dr. Jim Henningsen, CF president



From left: Doug Cone III, Sarah Cone and Diane Palmer

Amid an array of distinctive florals and fresh citrus, more than 150 guests gathered under the glowing chandeliers of the college's expansive Vintage Barn for the CF Foundation's annual Night at the Farm gala on March 1. This year, supporters donated more than \$80,000 for student scholarships while enjoying live violin music played by Michael Smith (The String Smith), sipping signature cocktails and savoring hors d'oeuvres featuring flavors from Florida.

This magical event raised funds to establish three endowed scholarships for students attending the College of Central Florida. Since 1989, more than \$2 million has been raised to support student scholarships through the CF Foundation's annual gala.

This year's event was presented by CAMPUS USA and Friends of Horse Farms Forever and was supported by numerous other generous businesses and individuals.

"Our local community support for CF is second to none," said Dr. Jim Henningsen, CF president. "Once again, our community showed up to support the Night at the Farm gala and most importantly, they showed up to support CF students."

Save the date now for next year's event – March 7, 2026!

# Homegrown and High-Tech

City of Ocala's top IT pro shares how CF helped him find career success.



By the time Christopher Ramos enrolled in CF's Computer Information Technology associate degree program, he was already working full time as an information systems technician. He figured out in high school that he wanted to work with computers, and an internship led to a job offer upon graduation. Three degrees and multiple promotions later, he calls himself "lucky" to be in the field he chose 20 years ago.

"Getting the internship was the biggest thing, because I figured out I can see myself doing this – it's not a job, it was actually a career," he said. And today, as the director of information technology and chief information officer for the City of Ocala, he says "the job is fun – there's always something going on." For this family man, however, the best part is that getting through college with no student loan debt and being able to work his way up in a high-demand field has allowed his wife to be a stay-at-home parent for their daughter and son.

"The career path I chose, and the amount of effort I put into it, has let me have the lifestyle I have now," he said. "A lot of people don't have the opportunity to say, 'Hey, I'm going to raise a family in Ocala and my wife can stay at home with our kids.'"

After earning his A.S. degree in 2010, Ramos decided to continue on to a bachelor's degree. He started at University of South Florida, but when CF launched its Bachelor of Applied Science in Business and Organizational Management – Management Information Systems Specialization in Spring 2011, he didn't hesitate to transfer back to CF.

"I was still living in Ocala and working here," he noted. "I was in the first class to graduate with that degree. CF was cost effective – I didn't have any grants and I paid my way through college."

Today, Ramos is a champion for those entering the IT field. Over the past year, all the new service desk hires in his department have been students and graduates from CF. Two employees on his team started as interns from the college and were subsequently hired full-time and have since gone on to more challenging roles within the department. As a member of the college's Business Advisory Council, he helped develop the new Geographic Information Systems (GIS) certificate program that launches in Fall 2025.

Ramos' recommendation for students? Consider "a high-quality, low-cost option that's local" for higher education.

## Distinguished Alumni and Service Awards

The College of Central Florida was proud to recognize former Florida Senator Dennis Baxley at the annual commencement ceremony on May 9. Born in Ocala, Baxley earned an Associate in Arts degree from CF in 1972. He is the first and only Floridian to

serve as speaker pro tempore of both the House and Senate. His service has made a lasting difference in Marion County and our great state of Florida, supporting many local nonprofits and community efforts. Baxley now holds the unique distinction of being the only recipient of both CF's Distinguished Alumni and Distinguished Service awards.



Keep up with the CF Alumni Association on Facebook or online at [www.CF.edu/Alumni](http://www.CF.edu/Alumni).





# A Triumphant Return

The Appleton's cherished bronze elephants are back – trumpeting flowing water into the reflecting pool.



Photo by Maven Photo + Film

Often considered the unofficial mascots of the museum, the trio of bronze elephants by renowned Thai artist Khien Yimsiri (1922-1971) has proudly greeted visitors from their perch in the front reflecting pool for decades. Acquired by museum founder Arthur I. Appleton (1915-2008) in 1986, the elephants were installed in the fountain the following year, coinciding with the museum's grand opening. Originally designed to function as fountains, they quickly became symbols of the museum's welcoming spirit.

Due to their constant exposure to Florida's intense sun and humidity, as well as the chlorine from the reflecting pool, the elephants have undergone periodic conservation to maintain their integrity. This has included the removal of stalactites (mineral deposits that form

from remaining in water for a long time) and the application of a fresh patina and protective wax coating. In 2015, the elephants were cleaned and moved to the back of the reflecting pool. Although they no longer functioned as fountains, they remained a beautiful and beloved part of the museum's park-like landscape.

To honor Mr. Appleton's original vision for the elephants and the reflecting pool, extensive research was conducted to assess the feasibility of returning them to their original placement and function. In late 2024, the elephants were de-installed and transported to Bronzart Foundry in Sarasota where they underwent thorough cleaning and plumbing repair. Meanwhile, the reflecting pool got a series of infrastructure upgrades, including marble exterior cleaning, resealing and waterproofing of the interior

pool floors, refreshed landscaping and the installation of new LED lighting to enhance the ambiance, especially for evening events.

On April 24, members of the Appleton Director's Circle and invited guests gathered for a special ceremony to celebrate the reinstallation of the bronze elephants. Attendees enjoyed live music by the CF Patriot Blues Jazz Ensemble and delicious barbecue from Artman's Country Smokehouse and received custom elephant tote bags screen printed by the Appleton education team. If you haven't had a chance to see the elephants in action, now's a great time to stop by and check out the restored fountain.



# Inspiring Young Minds

Appleton Museum staff provide an art-filled school year for East Marion Elementary students.



East Marion Elementary students at Winter Arts Night

Each year, the College of Central Florida and its campuses, including the Appleton Museum of Art, serve the K-12 communities across Marion, Citrus and Levy counties. Building on an existing partnership with College Park Elementary near the Ocala Campus, East Marion Elementary (EME) was welcomed as an official partner school in 2024. With the school being located in the Ocala National Forest, just a few miles from the museum, the partnership provided the unique opportunity to carry out special activities in this rural area of Marion County. Throughout the 2024-2025 school year, Museum Educator Hollis Mutch led a series of collaborative efforts, working closely with EME administrators to design programming tailored to the needs of their students and families, strengthening the connection between the school and the museum.

One of the year's standout moments was Winter Arts Night at the museum – a lively and creative evening to welcome students, their families and school staff for an unforgettable experience. Guests enjoyed a performance by EME's choir, posed for fun photo ops, got hands-on

with art activities in the Artspace and explored the galleries with a family-friendly scavenger hunt. Artwork created by EME second-grade students at a prior workshop was on display. Adding to the festive atmosphere, attendees had the chance to admire the East Marion holiday tree – part of the museum's annual Community Tree

Display – adorned with woodland-inspired ornaments handcrafted by the students. The event was a huge success, offering everyone a chance to enjoy the arts and feel more at home at the museum.

In addition to this special evening, the Appleton also welcomed EME's Safety Patrol and National Honor Society students for a daytime field trip to the museum. Marissa Brown, assistant director of admissions and student recruitment at the College of Central Florida, met with the students to spark conversations about their future and how CF could be part of their academic journey, encouraging them to think beyond elementary school. During their visit, students created ceramic mirrors that tied into EME's theme, "Watch me grow." This visit offered more than just an art-filled adventure; it supported key learning goals related to critical thinking, literacy, problem-solving and even motor skill development. Appleton staff also brought the museum directly to East Marion Elementary classrooms by participating in school events, leading art-making workshops, serving on committees and more throughout the year.

This summer, the museum is excited to continue supporting EME by offering a free, weeklong art camp at the school, and looks forward to building this meaningful partnership in the year ahead.



Fifth grade students from East Marion Elementary at the Appleton



# Best of Show and Stage

Our community connects to the arts at CF.



CF student Eileen McNiff Romero with Best in Show winner “Price of Passion”

## Awarding Art

The 2025 Student Art Exhibition showcased the work of a dozen CF students at the Webber Gallery March 31-May 6. The juried show featured a diverse range of mediums. Eileen McNiff Romero’s “Price of Passion” charcoal drawing took the top prize, Best in Show. “Faun,” a colored pencil work by Lillian VanHouten, was the first place winner. Lauren Tompkins was awarded second place for her ceramic “21 Grams,” and Annie Gregor earned third place for her pen-and-ink “Cup of Tea.” VanHouten, Gregor and Tiffani Thompson had purchase awards, and seven student artists received honorable mentions.



Abigail Stallings, CF assistant professor of digital media, with “Overgrown 1” and “Overgrown 5”

## Expert Exhibition

Four members of the college’s visual arts faculty exhibited their work in the biennial Faculty Art Exhibition at the Webber Gallery in January. Celebrating the creativity and innovative spirit of our faculty, pieces by Tyrus Clutter, professor and program manager for art, Abigail Stallings, assistant professor of digital media, Michele Wirt, senior professor of art, and Graham Young, associate professor of digital media, spanned mediums including ceramics, fiber arts, mixed media, printmaking and more.



CF student Hunter Leary solos with the Patriot Singers

## Love to Sing

The CF Patriot Singers presented “Songs of Hope and Love” on April 17, featuring 37 student singers under the direction of Dr. Jason Longtin, CF professor of music and department chair for visual and performing arts. Sopranos Camila Bran and Taryn Stepinsky, mezzo-soprano Sarah Dowlah, tenor Geovanni Jiminez and baritone Hunter Leary sang featured solos in a program ranging from classic Italian and Latin pieces to Hebrew love songs.



Vocalist Mikey Snow performs with the CF Patriot Blues Jazz Band

## Soul and Swing

“Patriots in the Groove,” the CF Patriot Blues Jazz Ensemble spring concert on April 15, spotlighted 18 student musicians. The swinging musical selections featured students playing saxophone, flute, trumpet, trombone, guitar, piano, bass and percussion, directed by Allen Venezia, associate professor of music and band program director. Mikey Snow was the featured student vocalist.

## Brass and Beats

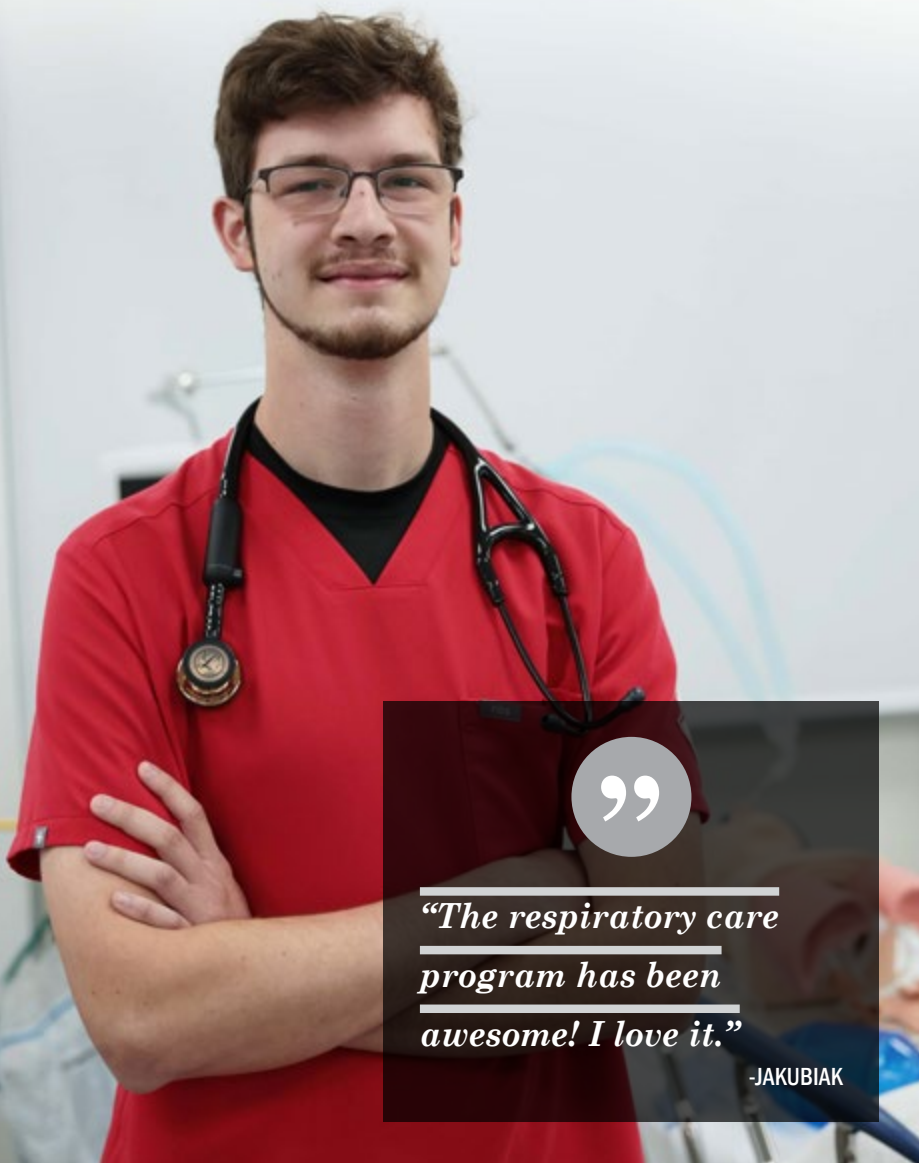
More than a dozen student musicians were featured in the spring concert presented by the CF Minutemen Brass Ensemble and the CF Percussion Ensemble on April 28. Musical selections included a program of songs highlighting trumpet, trombone, euphonium, tuba and a range of percussion instruments. Both ensembles are directed by Allen Venezia, associate professor of music and band program director.



From left: CF students Selena Trujillo-Page, Lucas Rosario and James Norman



## In Person with Adrian Jakubiak



”

*“The respiratory care  
program has been  
awesome! I love it.”*

-JAKUBIAK

A passion to help people is what led Adrian Jakubiak to train for a health care profession. As a student in the Crystal River High School Academy of Health Careers, he studied biomedical sciences. When he decided to continue his education at CF after high school, he knew that he wanted to pursue a health sciences career. So Jakubiak joined the very first cohort of CF’s new respiratory care program, which started in January 2025, taking classes at the CF Wilton Simpson Citrus Campus in Lecanto.

“It’s in the medical field, and it sounded like something I would enjoy doing,” Jakubiak remembered.

Jakubiak said he was looking at UF and other schools but chose CF because “it’s closer to home.” As a recipient of the Charles S. Dean Sr. Endowed Scholarship for Health Sciences, provided by a donation from the Citrus County Hospital Board, Jakubiak’s first semester tuition was covered at 100%.

For Jakubiak, like many students in Associate in Science degree programs, the hands-on training is “definitely one of the highlights.” In the first semester, he explained, students have been doing a lot of “observing and learning how things are done,” but they get more direct patient care experience as they progress in clinical rotations at HCA Florida Citrus Hospital in Inverness.

“Our main job is to protect the airway,” he explained. “We do O2 rounds and we check pulse oxygen to make sure it’s within a normal range, and we check the flow meters if patients are on oxygen.” Respiratory therapists, he noted, “will be there for things like intubation and extubation. We sometimes do neonatal. Another main job that we do is nebulizers. I’m really excited to be able to do arterial blood gases and actually be able to do treatments.”

Upon graduation in May 2026, Jakubiak plans to sit for the licensing exam to become a registered respiratory therapist and hopes to work in a hospital in Citrus County.

“The respiratory care program has been awesome!” Jakubiak said. “I love it.”