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Friday, May 7, 2010

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112th commencement will be historic

C-SPAN will be here Saturday to televise it live to the world, focusing on former student and astronaut Nicole Stott's comments to the more than 850 graduates expected to march. All of the graduates have unique backgrounds. Writer Casey Feldkamp has identified four who are featured here today with their [special stories](#).



C-SPAN to broadcast astronaut's SPC speech



*SPC alumnus and astronaut
Nicole Stott*

C-SPAN, the cable television company that provides live start-to-finish television coverage of government proceedings and other content, will be at Tropicana Field on Saturday, May 8, to provide coverage of astronaut Nicole Stott's speech to SPC graduates.

C-SPAN usually covers congressional hearings and other government-related events, but it also provides coverage of selected college commencement speeches every spring. A C-SPAN spokesman said the company had reviewed more than 500 upcoming commencement speakers and had selected about a dozen to cover live. Stott's SPC speech was one of those selected.

The coverage is expected to include the entire speech and will be carried live, starting at 10 a.m. It is the first time C-SPAN has ever covered an event at SPC.

C-SPAN describes itself as a private, non-profit company, created in 1979 by the cable television industry as a public service. It says its mission is to provide public access to the political process.

The company receives no government funding; operations are funded by fees paid by cable and satellite affiliates who carry C-SPAN programming.

Stott is a Clearwater native who graduated from Clearwater High School and attended SPC. Her first NASA space mission was last year, when she spent about four months on the International Space Station.

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Meet some of our graduating students



Victoria Hardina, 17, is an Early College student at the Clearwater Campus and will receive her Associate in Arts degree.

The concept of a family has never been an easy one for Victoria Hardina to grasp. She has been in and out of foster homes for the majority of her life and spent three years living on a Florida Sheriff's Youth Ranch, starting when she was 12.

"You're living with two other girls and the 'cottage parents'—the people who are running your house," Hardina said. "You're always with other girls who are going through the same thing that you are going through."

She attended Countryside High School and hated it, saying none of the other students were interested in their educations.

"I am goal-oriented," she said. "That is a really big deal for me."

Hardina enrolled in the SPC Early College



Melissa Harris is a Music Industry/Recording Arts student at the St. Petersburg/Gibbs Campus, and is the program's first graduate.

Melissa Harris, the college's first graduating Music Industry/Recording Arts student, views music as a science that accentuates art. She wants to work in the digital music field as a sound engineer and eventually become a music producer.

But her ideas for the future were not always so clear. She was a single mother to a son and daughter, Wolfgang and Logan, and she was trying to find a way to support her family.

"I was at the end of my marriage and was extremely depressed," Harris said. "I worked at Starbucks for a little bit, and that definitely was not where I wanted to be. I just wanted to do something more with my life; to get better educated."

She enrolled at SPC as



Jenny Tsantilas, 37, is a Women on the Way student at the Clearwater Campus, and will receive her bachelor's degree in Management and Organizational Leadership.

Jenny Tsantilas wanted to be a good role model for her children. So after 14 years of working in education, the single mother of three went back to school for a bachelor's degree in Management and Organizational Leadership (Non-Profit Organizations).

"I wanted to show my daughters that women can be strong and can do anything that they want to," Tsantilas said. "It was a chance to prove to them that education is very important."

Her daughters — Georgia, 12; Antiopi, 11; Samantha, 8 — have been her support system. They attended her honors society induction ceremony and the Women on the Way graduation ceremony in which she was the featured speaker in April.

Ryan Sweeney, a Collegiate High School student at the St. Petersburg/Gibbs Campus, will receive his associate's degree

It appears Ryan Sweeney is a model student. He maintains a high school GPA of 3.994 while serving as Student Government Association Junior Class President and as a member of the St. Petersburg College High School chapter of the National Honor Society. He has even been nominated and crowned Prom Prince.

But this was not always the case. In third grade, his teachers recommended him for Student Learning Disabilities.

"I hated school; I had the worst teachers," Sweeney said. "I even had a teacher call me stupid to my face in second grade."

He was bullied by classmates, ignored by teachers, and he ended up switching schools three times during his elementary school years. And in fourth grade, he'd had enough.

"I began to apply myself and I instantly started getting A's in everything," Sweeney said. "They recommended me for an IQ test. When I first took it, I got a 65. And they didn't think it was going to make a difference, but I took it again and I got a 135

Program to make her own way in life. Neither of her biological parents graduated from college.

"Just two years of college and I feel I am ahead of the game already," she said. "Not just academically, but also mentally. The social change from high school to college is big—once you're in college, who you hang out with doesn't matter anymore."

The graduating senior plans to attend Flagler College in St. Augustine in the fall to major in psychology with a minor in youth ministries on a full scholarship from Bright Futures and the Florida Sheriff's Youth Ranch.

"I want to help kids who are going through what I have gone through," she said. "I want to help them to keep positive attitudes through life, even when everything's not so great."

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a nursing student. But when she took a music theory class at the St. Petersburg/Gibbs Campus and was told about a new digital music A.S. degree program, everything changed.

"The (MIRA) program is basically what kept me from quitting school, and staying in a deep depression and just wanting to give up," Harris said. "Without that, I'd be in a completely different spot; I wouldn't really be hopeful for the future."

For the past two terms, Harris has been taking 18 credit hours while working three part-time jobs. She works as the college's MIRA studio manager 20 hours per week, works at a record store for 10-20 hours during the week, and also works as a tattoo artist 12 hours each weekend.

Balancing her home and work lives while also overloading with school has been difficult. "Staying at the top of my game in all three of those — which I think I've done pretty well — has been the biggest challenge," she said.

"The change has made me extremely exhilarated and hopeful, ready to keep moving forward at full speed to accomplish anything that I can," Harris said. "I want to be great in whatever I do."

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Starting in August, she completed 18 credit hours in both the fall and spring terms.

"It's been a challenging road, but it's rewarding, too," she said.

Her educational and occupational backgrounds are varied. She received an A.S. degree in Dental Hygiene from SPC in 1994 and worked several years in the field until she became a stay-at-home mom.

In 2004, she and her now ex-husband took over Plato Academy Charter School in Clearwater, and she worked as an administrator.

She hopes to enroll in the fall at USF to get a master's in adult education.

With a master's degree in hand, she wants to start a charter high school based on a model she created for her capstone course at SPC.

"Having the experience in the school system is not enough," Tsantilas said. "We need to have the educational backing. And that is where I'm headed."

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IQ score in fourth grade. I went from SLD to gifted in three months, and no one had ever done that in Florida state history.

"My motivation was a combination of wanting to show people what I could do, and to prove to myself that I could do it," he said. "Since then, I've been driving for more challenges and I haven't really lost at something I've put my mind to."

He works 30-35 hours per week as a Publix cashier and a night scorekeeper at the St. Pete Beach Recreation Center to help support himself and his mom.

Now the Doorways Scholar prepares for graduation Saturday and looks forward to what is to come. He has been accepted to the University of South Florida and plans to major in criminal justice and computer forensics.

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Interim president to be honored

The SPC faculty and staff will have an opportunity to thank Tom Furlong for his service as interim president at a cake and punch reception from 4:30-6 p.m. on May 27. The party will be in the board room at the EpiCenter and the entire SPC family is invited.

"Dr. Furlong has provided our college with outstanding leadership at a critical time of transition," said SPC Board of Trustees Chairman Terry Brett. "We are extremely grateful for his service."

Furlong has served as interim president since Jan. 1. He will continue to work with new president Bill Law throughout June. Law is expected to begin his presidency June 7.



Dr. Furlong

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College receives recognition for wellness efforts

SPC was recognized as a wellness champion by the Pinellas County Health Department on April 29. A certificate of appreciation was awarded to the college for its commitment to helping employees live healthier lives through its wellness policies and initiatives.

The City of Clearwater, Operation PAR and Pinellas County Schools also were recognized as success stories of workplace wellness. This is the first time the college has received the award.

The Wellness Challenge also has been the recipient of the Gold Fit-Friendly Status by the American Heart Association.

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Aetna deadlines for wellness requirements

The deadline to begin an [Aetna Online Wellness Program](#) is fast approaching. Employees who need to complete one or two Aetna Online Wellness Program(s) to fulfill their [wellness requirements](#) for the discounted health insurance rate must begin a program(s) by Friday, May 14. Completion of the 30-day evaluation for that program(s) is due by the wellness requirement deadline of June 15.

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Business Services deadlines

May 13 is the deadline for submission of requests to Purchasing for PO rollovers (see Fiscal Year End Guidelines).

May 14 is the last day to submit the following:

- Requisitions for Outlay Items (700000 accounts) for 2010.
- Requisitions in excess of \$25,000 requiring bids for 2010.

May 17 Summer Term begins.

May 17 Purchasing begins reviewing PO rollover requests with Budget Supervisors, Grant Accountants, and a Facilities Planning and Institutional Services account representative.

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Meeting notices

SPC Foundation Executive Committee Board of Directors Meeting will be Tuesday, May 11 at noon at the District Office, Consular Corps College conference room 102.

The **St. Petersburg College Foundation, Inc.** will have a **Planned Giving Committee Meeting** on May 18 at noon at the District Office, Room 102 of St. Petersburg College. This meeting will be to consider routine business of the Foundation.

The **SPC Alumni Association, Inc.**, will have a brief meeting on Tuesday, May 18 at 5:30 p.m. at the District Office, Consular Corps College conference room 102.

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Board of Trustees Notices

The St. Petersburg College Board of Trustees will meet on the following dates at the EpiCenter, 13805 58th St. N, Largo, Florida:

May 18, 8:30 a.m. - [View notice of meeting](#)

Routine business, EpiCenter, Room 1-453

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