FLORIDA EDUCATORS RECEIVE DOCTORATES

There’s a doctor in the house…..

Actually….make that four!

The Florida Conference is happy to announce that four of our educators have recently joined the ranks of the velvet berets and silken hoods “I can’t say enough about how proud we are of these four scholars,” says Vice President for Integrated Youth Ministries, Arne Nielsen. “In the final analysis, it’s all about our kids. The more we all know, the more our students benefit.”

Dr. Michael Cookenmaster, principal of Osceola Adventist Christian School in Kissimmee, completed his work at the University of Phoenix in February of 2012. His dissertation, A Quantitative Study on Teacher Implementation of Professional Development with Principal Follow-Up, has greatly benefited his
school this year. “We are delighted to have Michael on our team,” says Mayra Rodriguez, Associate Superintendent. “As a principal and study group leader, he provides practical help for his teachers as they learn to work with students with various learning needs.”

Dr. Eudora Stephens, teacher at Beryl Wisdom Adventist School, completed her work at Florida Atlantic University in the fall. “It has been my goal to discover how compassion, understanding, and kindness can have a ripple effect, spreading from teacher to students,” says Dr. Stephens. Her study, Leading the Way: The Relationship Between Effective Teachers’ Interactions with Their Students and Their Students’ Interactions with Each Other in Two Multi-Grade Parochial Classrooms, was lauded by her committee. “What a witness Eudora was to those who had the privilege of reading her study,” says Dr. Sandra Doran, Associate Superintendent who served on Eudora’s committee at Florida Atlantic University. “Her research spotlighted the Christ-like demeanor of two of our Conference teachers.”

Dr. Monty Murdoch, science teacher at Forest Lake Academy, was awarded his degree from Andrews University this past December. Dr. Murdoch, who cares deeply for God’s creation, also focused on the learning that is happening right here in Florida Conference. His study, Environmental Literacy of Seventh-day Adventist Teachers in the Parochial Schools of the Florida Conference of Seventh-day Adventists demonstrates how faith and learning are intertwined in our Adventist schools. "I look forward to the contribution that Monty will make at the upcoming Integrated Youth Minstry Nature Weekend where he can share his expertise with parents and leaders," says Vice President Arne Nielsen.

Our most recent graduate, Dr. Luis Cortes, Principal of Miami Adventist Academy, completed his work this month at North Central University. “It’s amazing that someone as busy as Luis managed to earn a doctorate while growing a school, beautifying his campus, and expanding his offerings,” says Frank Runnels, Superintendent. “His positive impact on our educational program in Florida is just incredible. He is always on the cutting edge which puts his teachers and students on the forefront of learning.” Dr. Cortes’ study, The Impact of Traditional vs. Virtual High School Course Instruction on Student Learning Outcome provides new data to inform our practice as we look at the various ways of delivering instruction in Florida.

FLORIDA ROBOTICS CLUBS TAKE NATIONAL AWARDS

Two Florida Conference schools have shown the nation what we can do! Orlando Junior Academy (OJA) and Forest Lake Education Center (FLEC) have announced their victorious return from the national competition of the Adventist Robotics League (ARL) held in Sacramento, California on May 5. The FLEC team, who just entered the arena this year, took second place for teamwork, second place for robotic design, third place for research project, and third place for robot performance. The OJA team, which organized four years ago, took first place in robotic design, second place in research project presentation, third place in core values and third place in robot performance.

Meeting the challenge of developing a product for senior citizens, both teams created practical solutions for the elderly. OJA’s Medi-Tab is a pill dispensing system that features a pill dispenser, a smartphone app, and a wristband which work together to track, remind, and alert seniors and their caregivers about their medication needs. The FLEC team’s SeniorBook App, features voice-activated video conferencing for seniors and loved ones, an alert system to remind seniors to make the daily calls, and a stand which dispenses medications and notifies the pharmacy when the pills run out.
The two Florida schools earned the right to participate in the national event with just 8 teams from four regions of the country after receiving overall scores that placed them in the top three teams at The Southern Challenge. The robotics section requires students to research, design, build, and program an autonomous robot that must complete a series of tasks in two minutes and thirty seconds. The research project, “Senior Solutions,” required students to conduct authentic scientific research and develop innovative solutions to solve real-world problems and challenges facing senior citizens that engineers, scientist, and technologists must solve today. The ARL is a full partner with the FIRST Lego League, www.firstlegoleague.org, an international competition that is designed to inspire future engineers, scientists and technology professionals. There are over 20,000 teams (200,000 students) participating in the FLL competitions this year.

Among a field of 22 participating teams who converged at Southern Adventist University on April 14, 2013, Florida schools quickly demonstrated what they could do. The FLEC student team, “Tech Geeks,” won first place in the teamwork category and
second place in the programming category. The OJA team, “Robojags,” took first place in programming, first place in research project presentation, and second place in robotic design. “We rarely give a first place award in programming,” commented Professor Tyson Hall. “In fact, we have not presented it to a team in several years, but this team is certainly worthy of it!”

The success of these teams was made possible by the cooperative efforts of teachers, administration, and parents. “We’re thrilled at the dedication of all our FLEC Robotics Club students, our volunteer parents and the FLEC administration for their intentional commitment to exposing our children to exciting learning opportunities in science, math and technology,” said Robert Henley, FLEC Club Director and communication and technology director for the Southeastern Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. “For a first-year robotics club to earn a berth at the nationals is truly remarkable and reflects the awesome academic potential of our kids when given a hands-on experience they are passionate about,” he added.

Mrs. Sabrina Miler, OJA’s Science teacher stated, “I am thrilled with what I witnessed. This exciting program involved real-world situations that were meaningful to the students who were challenged to solve problems that involved interaction with people in the community.  What a motivation for the students to realize that their solutions may have a positive impact on others in the future!”

CONFERENCE SUMMER CLASSES LEAD TO ACADEMIC CREDIT

Thanks to the efforts of Associate Superintendent, Mayra Rodriguez, the “Florida Conference Training Academy” has reached a new level! Beginning this summer, teachers can receive academic credit for the summer classes we offer to bring our teachers up to speed on conference initiatives.

In order to offer this “perk” to teachers, Rodriguez pursued a two-step process. First, she worked with the certification office at the Southern Union, requesting that the Union accept our training courses in partial fulfillment for renewal of certification. Once she gained approval, Rodriguez approached two universities and successfully applied for academic credit for two courses being offered this summer. Classroom Management Topic Course, a one week class offered June 3-7, will train teachers in the Responsive Classroom/Developmental Design model and result in one graduate credit hour from Southern Adventist University. Writer’s Workshop Clinic, a two week course offered June 10 - 21, will afford teachers the opportunity of working with actual students and result in three undergraduate credit hours from Oakwood University.

“This is great news,” teachers are heard remarking as they sign up for classes in record numbers. Combining academic credit, certification renewal, and training in the conference initiatives is the answer that busy teachers need.

Interested teachers should contact Alejandra Torres or Betty Jean Mader in the Education Office of the Florida Conference.
The Office of Education is proud to announce that Florida Conference will be a leader in helping students with special needs across the North American Division. Associate Superintendent, Mayra Rodriguez, Ed.S., has added a new title to the many hats she currently wears. As the newly appointed Southern Union REACH Coordinator (“Reaching to Educate All Children for Heaven”), Mayra will work with the various conferences in the Southern Union to provide training for teachers to increase their knowledge base in helping special needs students. She will also participate in REACH manual updates and represent the Southern Union at the NAD REACH Committee. The REACH manual is designed to provide support for general classroom teachers across North America working to ensure successful experiences for students with special needs.

“I am excited to be presented with this opportunity to benefit children all over the Southern Union, and participating in the NAD REACH Committee could potentially impact children all over the United States,” says Ms. Rodriguez, School Psychologist who has pioneered the special needs movement among Adventist schools right here in Florida. “It is my sincere hope that the good work we are doing here in Florida with our team of Special Needs Coordinators in local schools can be a model for others as they seek to find effective means of helping ALL children meet with success.”
Teachers at Greater Miami Adventist Academy display class quilts

Elementary school teachers worked together in teaching a lesson of hope, spirituality, and vision. Each patch depicts a student's dream for a better world.

(Left to right: Tamara Amich-Montero, Grade 4; Jicell Taylor, Early Childhood Director; Debbie Russell, Grade 2; Cheryl Alonzo, Kindergarten; Mary Hernandez, Grade 1; Melinda Crecelius, Grade 3; Heidi Salazar, Grade 5.

Diplomas and Mortarboards! **Congratulations to our graduates all over the conference!** From Pre-k to academy, families are celebrating as their sons and daughters mark another important milestone in their lives. Here, boys graduating in the Pre-k class at Forest Lake Education Center pose for a picture.
Deltona Upper Grades Students Memorize Book of James

Beginning in August, students at the Deltona Seventh-day Adventist School began studying the book of James. But their teacher did not stop at just explaining the verses. "In this day and age, it's important for our kids to fill their minds with powerful words of Scripture that can combat the enemy's attack," says Principal Manny Barajas, who designed the project. Each day, students studied verses and created pictures that would help bring the concepts to life and cement them in their memory. As the school year came to an end, Principal Barajas was proud to announce that the students had achieved their goal. They had literally memorized the entire book!