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Regional Outreach

BY JANET ZINK

HEN P.J. CROSBY WAS LOOKING TO EARN A degree in interdisciplinary social sciences, she didn't have to look very far.

USF St. Petersburg was right in her back yard.

Crosby, who lives in St. Petersburg, says she considered USF Tampa and even took one class there. But she liked the small class sizes and the proximity of the St. Petersburg campus.

"I chose to take classes in St. Petersburg because of the convenience," says Crosby. "And then when I attended, I enjoyed the size of the classes. That's what kept me there. My teachers know me by name and I know them. I like it. It's personal."

Crosby, a 35-year-old wife and mother who worked at Central Christian School throughout most of her college career, will graduate in December.

Her story speaks to the heart of the mission of USF: As USF grows in prominence as a national research university, it is doing so in ways that meet the needs of the community every step of the way.

"No matter where you live or work, USF is right there for you," says USF President Judy Genshaft.

That is the reason USF places so much emphasis on building and strengthening its programs on its regional campuses in St. Petersburg, Sarasota and Lakeland.

Within a decade of opening in 1956 in Tampa, USF expanded to the waterfront St. Petersburg campus on the edge of that city's downtown. The Sarasota campus opened in 1975, and a USF campus in Lakeland opened in 1986. Today, nearly 7,000 students of USF's 39,000 take advantage of course offerings at the three campuses.

In the last legislative session, lawmakers approved a plan to grant the three campuses more autonomy, which will allow each of the campuses to further grow and shape their programs to meet the unique needs of each community they serve.

The regional campuses already offer degrees and classes in Arts and Sciences, Business, Education and Nursing. Students can take a course or two, complete a bachelor's or graduate degree, or add to their skills through a graduate certificate. An MBA can be earned at any of the three campuses, and Sarasota/Maratee and Lakeland offer a 30-month part time MBA.
P.J. Crosby is a 35-year-old wife, mother and poet who is working on a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary social sciences with an emphasis on psychology at USF St. Petersburg. She will graduate in December. Crosby enrolled at USF after earning an associate's degree in fashion merchandising and working in that field for several years before deciding to pursue a career change. Crosby is Parliamentarian for the USF St. Petersburg Student Government and a member of the Campus Women's Collective. She hopes one day to write children's books.
program for mid-career professionals who want to earn the degree while still working. USF has the highest accreditation and lowest tuition charges for the MBA degree, according to a survey of business schools conducted by the *Tampa Tribune* in April 2002.

USF Lakeland and Sarasota/Manatee are upper-level campuses serving juniors, seniors and graduate students. To make it easier to earn a four-year degree, USF Sarasota/Manatee recently instituted a 2+2 Joint Admissions Program with Manatee Community College, the second such program in the state. The program eases the process for first-time-in-college students who want to earn an associate's degree from MCC and go on to earn a bachelor's degree from USF.

Students in the program have direct access to USF advisors, who have offices on the MCC campus and can answer questions about admission requirements, program availability and degree requirements. In 2000, the Florida legislature approved the admission of freshmen and sophomores at USF St. Petersburg. Economics major Steve White is a traditional-age sophomore who started at USF St. Petersburg last year as a freshman. He's USF St. Petersburg Student Government treasurer, took EMT courses while taking a full course load last year, and went to fire fighter school over the summer.

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A growing number of full-degree programs are available on the regional campuses. To meet specialized community needs, some degree programs are unique to the campus.

This fall, the Journalism Studies Program at USF St. Petersburg began offering an undergraduate degree in graphic design, and the University's master's degree in journalism is available only at USF St. Petersburg. Students accepted into the graduate program in journalism are eligible to participate in seminars and conferences at the Poynter Institute, a renowned journalism think tank located across the street from USF St. Petersburg.

The campus, which is now seeking separate accreditation, also hosts some of the University's flagship programs. The College of Marine Science is located at the campus, and the All Children's Medical Research Center is adjacent to it.

Degree programs offered by USF's Information Technology department are available only in Lakeland. IT bridges the gap between the College of Engineering's Computer Science and the College of Business's Management Information Systems (MIS). The campus also recently made an Industrial Engineering degree available in Lakeland.

"The USF-Lakeland service area is the heart of the emerging Florida High Tech Corridor, whose mission is to attract, retain

Sehui Sutton, 36, is working on an accounting degree at USF Sarasota/Manatee. A native of South Korea, she has lived in the U.S. for 13 years, and plans to graduate with a bachelor's degree in December 2003. She will then study for another year before taking the Certified Public Accountant's exam. Sutton earned her associates degree at Manatee Community College prior to coming to USF a year ago.

Sutton works full-time for the Sarasota County Sheriff's office. She is enrolled in three classes—one during the day, one at night and one on Saturdays.

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and develop high-tech industry,” says L. Preston Mercer, CEO of USF Lakeland. “These programs help attract and prepare a workforce for the businesses in the area.”

In January 2003, USF Sarasota/Manatee will open its School of Hotel and Restaurant Management. The first degree to be offered will be a bachelor’s degree in Hospitality Management. Students will have to complete 60 hours of course credit and 1,000 hours of work experience to earn the degree, which has been designed in collaboration with local industry professionals.

“Cooperation with the industry ensures the education meets the needs of students in the 21st century economy and builds a strong workforce in the Tampa Bay region,” says USF Sarasota/Manatee CEO Laurey Stryker.

All of the campuses play key roles in their communities through research and service and the enhancement of the workforce.

Seven out of the last nine teachers of the year in Sarasota and Manatee counties were graduates of the campus, and Sarasota/Manatee accounting program graduates earned the number one scores on certification exams in North Carolina, Georgia and Florida.

Lakeland Regional Medical Center recently approached USF Lakeland about creating a certificate program in nursing education for their nursing staff.

Administrators hope to take the project to other hospitals as well. To serve the educational needs of Polk County, the Educational Leadership Program at USF Lakeland offers a Fast Track Option that allows teachers to graduate with master’s degrees in a year and a half, and in conjunction with Polk County Schools offers a mentorship program to new school principals.

Located in the heart of downtown, USF St. Petersburg has 400 employees and a payroll that exceeds $48 million, making it one of the largest employers in downtown St. Petersburg.

The colleges of Education and Marine Science at USF St. Petersburg this year launched a marine science program at nearby Campbell Park Elementary School, and the college offers on-site mathematics and science courses to teachers at Campbell Park.

The campus is also home to the USF-YWCA Family Village. Opened in 1998, the Family Village addresses the needs of homeless parents who wish to pursue an education and create a better life for their children. It provides housing, food support, referral services and counseling to homeless families. The Child Development Center at the Family Village offers full-time, part-time, evening care and drop-in programs for children up to six years old, and elementary education graduate students at USF St. Petersburg participate in internships at USF-YWCA Family Village.

Like the USF Tampa campus, students at the regional campuses are typically older than traditional college age, with the average age of students in their mid-20s.

“Many of our students have already been part of the work force for a long time, and it takes an act of courage to start all over again. I have unbelievable admiration for them,” says Peter French, Ph.D., associate dean for academic affairs at the campus. “They work full time, they have kids, and they still have a commitment to their education.”

Course schedules accommodate the needs of this particular demographic. In addition to the part-time MBA program, Sarasota/Manatee offers “Weekend College” courses that allow students to earn an undergraduate general business degree by attending classes on weekends only. Sunset Semester courses begin at 4 p.m., rather than 6 p.m., which is the start-time for evening courses, allowing parents to get home and tend to their families.

Future plans call for programs that focus on arts organization management and non-profit business management, which are areas that drive the economy in the Sarasota area.

And this is precisely the kind of program development USF is seeking on each of its regional campuses. With increased autonomy and aggressive strategic plans, the regional campuses are growing in ways that meet a wide range of needs in the community.

“This arrangement works for students and taxpayers,” says Stryker, CEO of USF Sarasota/Manatee. “It respects and enhances our 25-year working relationship while providing important opportunities for USF Sarasota/Manatee to expand educational programs and services for the communities we serve. This is very good news for our region’s development.”