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Arrest of beloved librarian leaves campus reeling in shock, sadness

By Evy Guerra
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In 25 years as a student, teacher and librarian, James Anthony . Schnur became one of the university’s most respected figures. As a student, he was a campus leader and author of a much-admired master’s thesis. As a teacher and librarian, he helped countless students and faculty on research projects. And as a champion of the university, he was honored with top awards from the administration and his alumni.

So his April 12 arrest on charges of possessing child pornography and bestiality images left the campus reeling in shock and sadness.

Typical was the reaction of Dr. Raymond Arsenault, who as a professor of history and politics mentored Schnur as a student and steered many students his way for help in their research. “I think the world of Jim,” said Arsenault, who has taught at USF since 1980. “He was one of the best students I’ve ever had and an amazing resource for the community.

“I know many, many people who treasured him and have been devastated by the news,” said Arsenault. “I’ve known him for about 25 years, and in that time I’ve developed a great respect and admiration for him. This news has made me sick at heart.”

Woodward “Woody” Hanson, a beloved professor emeritus of history and University Archives. He is the founder of a real estate appraisal, consulting and brokerage firm in Fort Myers. “I know these charges hold a negative connotation, but I hope the community gives him his constitutional right. He should be considered innocent until proven guilty.”

Schnur, 51, was arrested at his home in Seminole after the Pinellas County Sheriff’s Office said it discovered images of child pornography and bestiality on his computer. He was charged with 10 counts of possession of child pornography and two counts of prohibition of certain acts in connection with obscene materials.

His bail was set at $1 million. Late Sunday he remained in custody at the Pinellas County Jail. One of his attorneys, Maribeth Wetzel of St. Petersburg, said Sunday that she could not provide comment. She said that they have decided to reserve on bail, instead waiting until her team better understood the case before pursuing a bail hearing.

Shortly after Schnur’s arrest, the university released the following statement: “USF St. Petersburg is aware of the reported incident involving James Schnur, but cannot comment as this matter is under investigation. Mr. Schnur has been employed at the university since 2000 and currently serves as Head of Special Collections and University Archives. He is on leave pending the university’s review of the matter.”

Schnur is a native and lifelong resident of Pinellas County and graduated from Boca Ciega High School in Gulfport in 1983. He earned a bachelor’s in history from USF in 1988 and master’s degrees in history in 1995 and library science in 1996.

Dr. Gary Mormino, now professor emeritus of history

Alum seeks vacant downtown City Council seat

By Devin Rodriguez
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Growing up, Corey Givens Jr. heard about how St. Petersburg used to be from his grandfather. She told him how she couldn’t go downtown after dark, she said, and her family was not allowed to swim at the whites-only Spa Beach on the approach to the Municipal Pier.

Now, two generations later, Givens is running for the District 6 City Council seat to represent the same downtown that his grandmother told stories of as a little boy.

St. Petersburg has come a long way since, but Givens says the city can do even better.

“The division and the racial divide back then I think is what encourages me to want to make my city a better place because I recognize that wasn’t very long ago,” said Givens, 25. “Although

See “Givens’ “P3

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Second Effort: Corey Givens Jr. unsuccessfully ran for a position on the Pinellas County School Board in 2012. He graduated from USF St. Petersburg in 2014 with a bachelor’s degree in mass communications.

Page 5
Former dean could take SPC president seat

By Luke Cross
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A fter stepping down March 22, former dean of the College of Arts and Sciences Frank Biafora has been declared one of five finalists to become the president of St. Petersburg College.

Before coming to USF St. Petersburg as a dean and tenured professor, Biafora was an associate dean at St. Johns University. His doctorate in sociology comes from the University of Miami, where he also served as a postdoctoral fellow.

Biafora attributes stepping down to the natural progression of his career and USF St. Petersburg’s prospective expansion.

“I felt it was time to let someone else step into the dean’s role to bring fresh new ideas to the position,” said Biafora.

After stepping down, Biafora returned to the University of Miami as a postdoctoral fellow.

Biafora attributes stepping down to the natural progression of his career and USF St. Petersburg’s prospective expansion.

“I felt it was time to let someone else step into the dean’s role to bring fresh new ideas to the position,” said Biafora.

The goal is to keep local community colleges.

Given the large number of transfer students at USF St. Petersburg, the college is positioned very well for the future.”

William D. Law, Jr., current president of SPC, announced his retirement last November after serving since 2010. Law took to mentoring Biafora during his presidency through academic leadership programs.

“I love the relationship we have had with SPC, and when the opportunity came up, I couldn’t pass on it,” Biafora said. “I learned so much thanks to their senior level administrators and faculty, and did a lot of work to bring our two institutions more closely in line.”

Biafora had a hand in creating FUSE, an academic program intended to streamline the transition for students transferring to USF from SPC as well as other local community colleges.

“If Biafora lands the position, he hopes to expand both the interaction between SPC and USF St. Petersburg as well as the inclusion of international students in the FUSE program.

“Our campus and SPC is always looking for more international students, and I believe FUSE is an opportunity there.”

Before implementing his plans, Biafora must outlast the other applicants looking to fill the presidential position.

Competition includes the president of the College of Central Florida, provost of Santa Fe College, and the current provost and senior vice-president of St. Petersburg College.

The presidential search committee determined the five finalists April 10 after viewing an eight minute video application from each semi-finalist.

In addition to the video, current candidates were required to submit a curriculum vitae, resume and cover letter, all of which are publicly available on SPC’s presidential search blog.

“Everything in the search is done in the sunshine,” shared Biafora.

Now that the finalists are determined, all five will attend a interview process with faculty, staff and students across SPC’s multiple campuses before meeting with the board of trustees for questioning.

President Law states his last day will be June 30, but he says he is willing to stay on a bit longer if the process takes a bit longer than expected,” according to Biafora.

“Somewhere between now and mid-June, I would say, is when I final decision will be made.”

Irrelevant of the committee’s decision, the former Arts and Sciences dean is proud of his accomplishments and hopes to remain in the community for the foreseeable future.

“I’ve been blessed over the years with terrific leaders to work with,” said Biafora. “And I’ve got a couple more years I want to give.”

Schnur, continued from P1

and scholar in residence at the Florida Humanities Council on campus, is a longtime mentor and friend to Schnur.

“I am deeply saddened by the news of Jim Schnur’s arrest,” Mormino said in an email to The Crow’s Nest. “I have known him since he was an undergraduate, and admire his work and work ethic. I hope and pray that the news is not true.”

Mormino was on the board that reviewed Schnur’s work for his master’s in history.

Schnur’s thesis was the on the Johns Committee, a controversial investigative body of the Florida Legislature between 1956 and 1965.

The secretive committee was originally established to try to discredit the civil rights movement. When those efforts faltered, the committee launched a crusade to expose what it called the “homosexual menace” in Florida’s educational institutions.

Among the committee’s targets were faculty and administrators at the newly created University of South Florida Tampa.

The committee’s “star chamber” investigation of “student habits, teaching practices and curricular materials” left permanent scars on the new university, Schnur concluded in his research.

Schnur has been a stalwart at the Nelson Poynter Memorial Library since 2002. As special collections librarian, he manages rare books, manuscripts, oral histories, primary source collections and a trove of files on USFSP and its history.

He has taught courses at the university and at Eckerd College and written several books on the history of Pinellas County and its communities.

In 2014, he was honored with the Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Service, and in 2005, he was given the first Lester Tuttle Award from the USF Pinellas County alumni chapter.

In recent months, Schnur had been working on projects with the university’s journalism department and the city’s Midtown neighborhood. He was creating a digital archive of The Weekly Challenger, which has served St. Petersburg’s black community since 1967.

Dr. Bernardo Motta teaches Neighborhood News Bureau, a journalism class dedicated to community journalism. Motta invited Schnur to speak to his class at the beginning of the semester and steered students to him for help on their class projects.

“Jim was very generous with his time,” Motta said. “I have some students working on a project about food in Midtown. Jim was the first person they spoke with. He came to the class to discuss his research and was a source for a lot of students.”

Motta and Schnur were also working on a project celebrating over 150 years of black history in St. Petersburg. Motta said Schnur was central to the project, but he thinks it can continue despite Schnur’s absence.

The news of Schnur’s arrest came as a big surprise, Motta said.

“I think this is a tragedy. This is going to be a tough situation for a lot of people on campus,” Motta said.

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“Jim has dedicated his life to scholarship and student success,” she said. “Our community’s pain is monumental at this turn of events.”

I’m looking for independent drivers that want to hustle at their own pace in their own style and make some $$$.

The Bulls have started their spring action in upcoming season preview.

By Michael Moore Jr. michaelmoor@mailusf.edu and Michael Ferguson mfergusson@mailusf.edu

This weekend saw the USF football team return to the field — a soccer field to be specific.

The annual spring game was held at Corbett Stadium in front of a packed audience. The scrimmage featured the green team, led by sophomore quar- terback Brett Kean, defeating freshman quarterback Chris Oladukun’s white team 15-14.

The friendly exhibition game served as a preview for the upcoming season with the new head coach Charlie Strong.

Starting quarterback and reigning American Athletic Conference Player of the Year Quinton Flowers played only two possessions, where he threw for 240 yards and a one-yard touchdown.

Flowers will be without his two biggest offensive weapons from last year, running back Marlon Mack and wide receiver Rodney Adams, who both entered the NFL draft. Johnson, who has inherited the starting position from Mack, is expect- ed to take up a good portion of that workload.

Both offenses had exciting moments as the quarterbacks battled for the right to be Flowers’ backup. Sickles High alumni Odudukun found sophomore Darnell Salomon down the sideline for a 76-yard touchdown. But it didn’t take long. Kean long to respond with his own game-winning 51-yard touchdown strike to Lakewood High alum Marquez Val- des-Scantling.

Redshirt freshman Elijah Mack had a few names called often, as he lead all rushers with 60 yards on 14 carries. Senior Darius Tice had seven rushes for 47 yards, including a breakaway 22-yard run.

Additionally, kicker Emilio Nadelman found some redemption after a second half of the first few inter-squad scrimmages by nailing a 44-yarder into the wind. But make no mistake, the defensive unit has their work cut out for them.

They combined to force 11 punts total, with seven sacks and 11 tackles for loss. Senior safety Devin Abraham and Junior safety Jaymon Thomas each helped their team out with an interception. Sophomore defensive end Greg Reaves had two sacks and 2.5 tackles for a loss. Senior cornerback Tariq Senat had both a sack and a forced fumble.

Overall, the unit showed marked improvement under new defensive coordinator Bri- an Jean-Mary. Whether or not this progress will translate into regular season results remains to be seen. Playing on the defensive side of the ball was a weakening weakness during last year’s campaign, with the unit ranked 120th out of 128 Division I-A Schools.

This year should see more bite-heavy packages that seek to put pressure on opposing offenses.

Despite it being a rebuilding year defensively, the unit will see nine returning players, in- cluding seniors Anthony Fobbs and Rick De- atrick as well as new captain and linebacker Auggie Sanchez, whose 303 career tackles rank second among returning seniors.

Coach Strong took the mic at halftime and expressed his appreciation for the support, and added that he hoped to see this same level of enthusiasm at Raymond James Stadium in a few months.

Last season saw the Bulls finish with a record of 11 wins and 2 losses, which allowed them to finish in the top 25 for the first time in school history at No. 19 in the AP and Coaches polls.

This year, with a promising new coaching staff, a returning superstar quarterback and a bolstered defense, the sky’s the limit.

Michael Moore Jr. | THE CROW’S NEST

Domination Imminent: The Bulls hosted a spring game scrimmage on Saturday, April 15. The game pit Bulls against one another in a showcase that served to highlight the progress the team has made since last season.
Recipe: Game day BBQ cauliflower
By Whitney Efstrom
wefstrom@mail.usf.edu

B arbecue chicken wings are always a crowd pleaser, but what if I told you that you could achieve the same great taste but with cauliflower instead? The phrase “if it’s not broke, don’t fix it,” doesn’t apply to this delicious meat free alternative. Beloved by vegans, omnivores and carnivores alike, this is a perfect Sunday football snack.

Don’t trust me? I guess you’ll have to see for yourself. Who knows, maybe it’ll be your new meatless monday go to.

Ingredients
• 1 large cauliflower head
• 1 cup any flour
• 2 cups nut milk
• 1 ½ boxes of crackers
• 1 bottle of bigg sauce
• 4 medium sized bowls

Directions
1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees.
2. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.
3. Peel the leaves off of the cauliflower, cut the head from the stem and pull apart the florets. They will be large and should be cut into roughly two-three inch pieces. Wash and put to the side.
4. In a bowl whisk together the flour and milk. If the mixture is lumpy put the batter to a blender and blend on low for 15 seconds. Transfer back to bowl. Be careful to not overmix, the consistency should be that of pancake batter.
5. Add crackers to food processor and set to grind setting. Transfer crumbs to bowl.
6. Dip florets into batter, dip off excess, roll in cracker crumbs and place on baking sheet. Repeat.
7. Bake for 15-20 minutes.
8. Pour BBQ sauce into a bowl. Using tongs, dip the wings into the sauce once again dripping off the excess. Place back on baking sheet.
9. Bake for another 10 minutes.
10. Let wings cool and serve with vegan ranch.

On the Edge: Hosted April 14, the Fringe Pop Up Market housed a variety of local businesses. Located in front of Star Booby Salon and Foolish Pride Tattoos, the market ended next to the new Planet Retro Records storefront.

Recipe: Game day BBQ cauliflower
By Emily Bowers
emilybowers@mail.usf.edu

O ne of a kind artwork, handcrafted jewelry and social justice awareness populated the brand new Fringe District pop up market. Visitors poured over each booth, which highlighted the passions of their owners.

Sunshine City Books, owned by Rose Robbins, encourages empathy, promotes diversity and tolerance, all while providing socially aware books to children. You may even see it traveling through town. Robbins and her book bus contain a collection of books for all ages, ranging from birth to young adult. Stories like “Rad Women Worldwide,” “Tough Guys (Have Feelings Too)” and “Be a Changemaker” are just a few that speak to children on the themes of social awareness.

“All of these books are positive messages,” she said. “The ultimate goal is to change the world through books.”

Feathers Fate & Steel, owned by Danielle Dawley, is indie by birth right down to its core. This boutique, which sells one of a kind clothing, jewelry and accessories can be found near Patty & Friends Antiques in downtown St. Petersburg. Their products are housed in a Spartan travel trailer from 1946, which Dawley spent a year restoring. “We spent a lot of time re-building this, and now we get to travel around in it,” Dawley said. Dawley has already taken the trailer out on the road to visit the Sound on Sound festival in Texas. Her reason for owning this portable shop comes from her history of traveling. “I’ve spent my whole life traveling the world, and I want to keep doing that,” she said.

Booths like Old Crow and Pergamo Paper Goods sold other handmade goods. Old Crow, owned by Bridget Ahearn, sells vintage clothes that are painted or embroidered by Ahearn and her coworkers. Ahearn was even sewing designs into a pair of shorts during her time at the market. Pergamo Paper Goods sells collage-paintings that feature animals dressed in fancy clothing. Shop Destrya is a shop located in Fort Lauderdale that sells feminist and Latina inspired shirts and accessories. Natalia Marrero, who owns this shop, says her South Florida roots inspire the Latina flare in her products. She sells every thing from shirts to stickers. Marrero designs swatches of fabric with sayings like “no means no” and “not your sweetheart” herself. Her goal is to think outside the box when it comes to the designs of feminist apparel and to encourage intersectionality in all feminist clothing.

“You don’t have to be a vagina to be a feminist,” said Marrero. The St. Pete Women’s Collective attended the Fringe market provides social justice outlet

Crown’s Corner: How to deal with stress and anxiety
By Lis Casanova
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W e’ve been there. Sweaty palms grasping a shaking coffee cup, sore eyes and a headache that won’t go away. It’s more than sick, you are stressed and with finals looming around the corner, it’ll only get worse. It might seem like everything will crumble, burying you in a cascade of term papers and exams, but with a few steps you can overcome. Being a functioning adult may seem like fantasy, but if you just take a few positive steps from this list you could make it out of finals alive.

1. Make a plan
When your list of things to do grows from three to 20 in a single day and you feel the grip of panic take hold, recognize that moment as your cue to show the world who’s boss. Tackle the list by designating priorities. Follow that by attributing each day its own tasks and purpose. Doing this should facilitate efficiency and provide some ease of mind.

2. Apply a positive mindset
One of the most important lessons to combat stress is accepting that you are not help less. Sure, it can become debilitating and may even inhibit your mind from functioning at its fullest, but always remember that it all comes down to you. It’s all about the choices you make and the thoughts you choose to feed. Pep talks are not out of the question: never underestimate the power of a “fake it until you make it” attitude. Fueling yourself up with positive words does have an effect.

3. Demand control
Anxiety can be crippling and advice can fall short of acknowledging the severity of it. Our mind has a way of running in circles, screaming chaos. Our mind has a way of running in circles, screaming chaos. Our mind has a way of running in circles, screaming chaos. Our mind has a way of running in circles, screaming chaos. Believe in yourself. Halt the insecurities and remember that you are awesome. When that voice pops into your mind and rattles off all the wrong things — push yourself towards what empowers you and keep moving.

4. Claim your space
Because stress and anxiety doesn’t always adhere to school, I would also like to briefly address the issue of social anxiety. Social anxiety comes down to feelings of inadequacy and unease. A thought that I’ve found helpful is that no one is watching or judging you near as much as you think they are. Everyone is worried with their own shit.

You might be unapologetic about who you are — whether that means being goofy, quiet or awkward. Don’t be hard on yourself about it, and don’t try to pretend to be anyone else. Know your worth and what you bring to the table, then claim your place and take a seat.

4 A&E | APRIL 17, 2017
THE CROW’S NEST

EMILY BOWERS | THE CROW’S NEST
Review: Kendrick Lamar’s ‘DAMN.’ is sinfully good

By Jonah Hinabaugh
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Kendrick Lamar’s recent album, “DAMN.” serves to help an old blind woman who just lost a son, that some people in this world are unhappy with the current political climate on this record. In the first song “BLOOD,” we are met with the metaphor of life and death as Kendrick is shot in the song as he attempts to help an old blind woman running his current campaign.

“We want to make sure we have accountability except for myself.” Givens said. “I was young, I’ve had the experience, I’ve been immersed in the work of my community, and I had the opportunity to serve with others and to listen to what our city wants and needs.”

The Aug. 29 primary election is still months away, but there is already a total of nine candidates running for the seat of Karl Nurse, who will be stepping down because of term limits. Givens worked on Nurse’s 2015 campaign and is set on taking his place. During the campaign, Givens, he thought of Nurse as a mentor. “I plan to succeed Karl,” said Givens. “Watching Karl balance being a family man, business man, a statesman — I think that meant a lot to me because that’s what I strive to be. It takes a strong person to be able to handle being in the public eye.”

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By Michael Moore Jr.

When you spend hundreds of dollars on a plane ticket, you generally do so under the assumption that you won’t be violently dragged off the plane for no good reason. Yet this appears to be a specialty of sorts for United Airlines.

When the story of Dr. David Dao being forcibly removed from a United flight was re-leased, it quickly went viral. I was outraged. United claims that the flight was overbooked and ask ed for four volunteers to surrender their seats. When no one offered their seats, they offered money. Still no volunteers. So, United randomly chose passengers. One was Dao. He refused, stating that he was a doctor that needed to see his patients. The end result? The doctor was violently ripped from his seat and lugged down the aisle, his mishandled as he shouted in alarm and confusion.

His fellow passengers yelled, expressing dismay and protest against the way he was being treated. Now, many of us are yelling at our television screens from home. When a flight is overbooked, there’s generally some sort of announcement addressing it at the gate. There is a request for people to voluntarily relinquish their seat in exchange for some level of monetary compensation. But that’s not how things went down this time.

There was no such request at the gate. That’s because the flight wasn’t overbooked in the traditional sense. By all accounts, every passenger that showed up had room on the plane. The plane was already completely boarded by the time four non-paying United employees showed up at the gate. Notice something about that statement? They paid zero dollars — they did not have tickets — they were, therefore, breaking the traditional sense of the word.

United made a conscious decision that their employees are more valuable than their customers when they chose to involuntarily remove someone with a ticket in favor of some one that paid nothing.

CEO Oscar Munoz released the following statement concerning the incident: “This is an upsetting event to all of us here at United. I apologize for having to re-accommodate these customers. Our team is moving with a sense of urgency to work with the authorities and conduct our own detailed review of what happened.”

In the wise words of Han Solo, “Jeez, I’m out of it for a little while and everyone gets dechus of grandeur!”

Munoz is out of touch, off base and totally delusional in regards to this situation. He uses the word re-accommodation when I think he means assault. According to his lawyer, even after Dao was discharged from the hospital on Wednesday, he will need reconstructive surgery to repair the injuries sustained during the event.

If anything other than an emergency situation prompted such a removal, then this is just absurd. In a situation with several options, United chose by far the worst. And that is a reflection of their company.

It later came out that Dao was convicted in 2004 of prescribing painkillers in exchange for sex. Many have used this to rationalize and justify the abuse levied on him. For me, it is irrelevant. Whether he is good, bad or chaotic, this was an injustice. We live in a day and age of outrage culture. The internet is a vehicle that gives us the opportunity to explode over trivial things. This isn’t one of them. I don’t know about you, but I don’t want to board a plane knowing that I might be violently ejected off it against my will.

Editorial: Group projects, the bane of college existence

Group projects can mimic life outside of college in a great way. They offer students the choice to collaborate in a dynamic environment where imagination and self motiva tion can flourish. But we can’t get over this procrastination problem. It’s like an epidemic.

Real life group projects hold one key difference from school group projects though. That is that the common motivator is not a grade, but a product, a common goal that falls in line with everyone’s interest. If this model of “the product” could be adopted into classrooms, where students did not feel pressured to achieve a certain grade by checking off boxes on a rubric and instead produce original, uncompromising material.

Freeloader: Working in a group is always an ordeal. Even when you’ve got two of those solid workers, there’s always that one group member who has to be carried to the finish line. Sometimes literally.
We’d Love to Hear from You

The Crow’s Nest accepts letters to the editor. All submissions should be no more than 250 words. Writers must include their full name. In addition, USF faculty should include their title, department and extension. All letters are subject to editing for clarity and length. Letters can be sent to drodriguez7@mail.usf.edu with subject title “letter to the editor.”
Students celebrated the Indian Festival of Color on the harbor lawn on Wednesday, April 12. The event is memorable for students due to the extensive use of powder.

The colors are like the rebirth that occurs during the spring when flowers start to grow again in preparation for the summer,” Dang said.

Running through a cloud of color, there’s no way to explain it. It was a surreal feeling and I didn’t feel like I was in the middle of a college campus.”

Santiago was caked in a myriad of colored chalk, with the thickest layer being on her hair, forehead and T-shirt.

“I can feel the chalk in my eyebrows,” she said. “It feels like baby powder.”

Santiago’s friend Sofia Roca, a freshman business major who was also coated in chalk, said she loved the Bollywood dancing.

“The movements were not like traditional American-style dancing,” Roca said.

Dang and her friends, junior marketing student Savannah Harrison and Asmita Palsule, a freshman finance major, provided the dancing talent.

The three women wore aviator sunglasses and pale, sandy-colored Patiala suits that Dang brought back from India when she visited in February. They danced the Bhangra, a traditional folk dance originating in the Indian state of Punjab. The side-to-side neck movements and forward-and-back foot slides entranced the nearly 25 students who watched the performance.

Signifying the different types of dances, Dang and Harrison changed out of their Patiala shirts and into T-shirts for the Bollywood dancing segment to distinguish that they were no longer doing traditional Indian dances.

Choreographed by Dang and Harrison, the three dancers began learning the dances in January, practicing two, sometimes three times a week.

Just before the event, Harrison, Palsule and Dang did some last minute practicing in the USC women’s bathroom.

“It’s a little silly tradition we have that dates back to our first performance together,” said Harrison, who has been friends with Dang ever since a creative writing class three years ago.

“Even though we had worked hard all semester to perfect our two dances for that [first] evening, I was still incredibly nervous. So while we were getting ready in the USC bathroom, Radhika played our songs and we did a couple light runs through our dances.

“It was just a little thing, but it helped ease my nerves a lot. Ever since then it’s become part of our day-of-show ritual.”

In the four years that Dang hosted Holi Hai, the most common reaction she’s gotten from students about the event are from those who’ve participated in the holiday the year before and remembered how much they enjoyed it.

“These kids who show up are genuinely having fun and I love how everyone connects over this,” she said.

Although the Holi Hai holiday is traditionally done with family and friends, this didn’t stop the students from being overcome with laughter when a complete stranger ran up to them to smear red chalk on their cheeks and foreheads.

“The great thing about this event is that you don’t know each other before you come out,” Dang said. “But by the time you’ve dumped blue powder on someone’s head, you do.”

By Tim Fanning
ftanning@mail.usf.edu

We have 700 packets of colored powder to go through, y’all,” shouted DJ Silencer over the booming Bollywood music. “We are going to turn USF into a rainbow, but don’t worry because the color will come off in the wash.”

Six students in white T-shirts stood ready on each side of the harbor lawn, their eyes on the 10 packs of powdered color laid on the grass before them. “Three, two, one. GO!”

Like at the start of a dodgeball match, the students sprinted forward. Elliott Darrow, a freshman zoology major, dropped to the ground to snag a color packet before he could be stampeded by the students rushing toward him. Ripping the package with his teeth, he flung it up into the air, blanket everyone in a cloud of green dust.

April 12 marked the fourth year of Holi Hai at USF St. Petersburg, the Indian Festival of Color that celebrates the coming of spring and the joy of friendship.

Hosted by the South Asian Association (SAA), the event included Indian food and a mixture of Bollywood and Bhangra dancing, as well as 700 packets of red, blue, green, yellow and pink powder which represent happiness, love and the freedom to live vibrantly.

Radhika Dang, founder and president of SAA, wanted a way for students to know more about Indian culture than just Indian restaurants and Bollywood, so she began hosting Holi Hai on campus.

“The colors are like the rebirth that occurs during the spring when flowers start to grow again in preparation for the summer,” Dang said.

Holi Hai has been one of the most memorable student events on campus, reaching around 70 people in its first year.

Yesenia Santiago, a sophomore psychology major, who participated in the event said, “I liked the colors the most. I didn’t feel like I was in the middle of a college campus.”

Santiago was caked in a myriad of colored chalk, with the thickest layer being on her hair, forehead and T-shirt.

“I can feel the chalk in my eyebrows,” she said. “It feels like baby powder.”

Santiago’s friend Sofia Roca, a freshman business major who was also coated in chalk, said she loved the Bollywood dancing.

“The movements were not like traditional American-style dancing,” Roca said.

Dang and her friends, junior marketing student Savannah Harrison and Asmita Palsule, a freshman finance major, provided the dancing talent.

The three women wore aviator sunglasses and pale, sandy-colored Patiala suits that Dang brought back from India when she visited in February. They danced the Bhangra, a traditional folk dance originating in the Indian state of Punjab. The side-to-side neck movements and forward-and-back foot slides entranced the nearly 25 students who watched the performance.

Signifying the different types of dances, Dang and Harrison changed out of their Patiala shirts and into T-shirts for the Bollywood dancing segment to distinguish that they were no longer doing traditional Indian dances.

Choreographed by Dang and Harrison, the three dancers began learning the dances in January, practicing two, sometimes three times a week. Just before the event, Harrison, Palsule and Dang did some last minute practicing in the USC women’s bathroom.

“It’s a little silly tradition we have that dates back to our first performance together,” said Harrison, who has been friends with Dang ever since a creative writing class three years ago.

“Even though we had worked hard all semester to perfect our two dances for that [first] evening, I was still incredibly nervous. So while we were getting ready in the USC bathroom, Radhika played our songs and we did a couple light runs through our dances.

“It was just a little thing, but it helped ease my nerves a lot. Ever since then it’s become part of our day-of-show ritual.”

In the four years that Dang hosted Holi Hai, the most common reaction she’s gotten from students about the event are from those who’ve participated in the holiday the year before and remembered how much they enjoyed it.

“These kids who show up are genuinely having fun and I love how everyone connects over this,” she said.

Although the Holi Hai holiday is traditionally done with family and friends, this didn’t stop the students from being overcome with laughter when a complete stranger ran up to them to smear red chalk on their cheeks and foreheads.

“The great thing about this event is that you don’t know each other before you come out,” Dang said. “But by the time you’ve dumped blue powder on someone’s head, you do.”