

Dental Hygiene Seniors Pass CRDTS

All five Dental Hygiene seniors passed their Central Regional Dental Testing Services (CRDTS) clinical examination for licensure in Augusta on Saturday, April 20.

(L-R) Mally Bird, Taylor McLendon, Cristian Granjeno, Kelly Joseph, and Aubree Swain

STC Students Attended GSGA Conference

Two students from Southeastern Technical College attended the Georgia State Leadership Level Up Conference and competed in Student Government Association competitions in Atlanta April 12-14, 2024.

In keeping with the conference theme, the students participated in competitions aimed at improving communication and leadership skills.

Sabrina McLeod, Early Childhood Care and Education student, competed in Job Interview and Prepared Speech and was nominated for Outstanding Student of the Year.

McLeod said, "Attending this remarkable conference has inspired me with the belief that with perseverance, anyone can overcome obstacles encountered on the path to success. The power of teamwork, exemplified by exceptional leaders, propels individuals toward their fullest potential and personal growth. I send heartfelt gratitude to the SGA advisors for

instilling confidence in me and fostering self-belief. With remarkable appreciation.”

Whitney Williams, Cosmetology student, competed in Prepared Speech.

“A true leader is about multiplying yourself and making others better,” said Williams.

The students gained valuable strategies to enhance and improve communication skills and were provided tools for becoming effective leaders in today’s society. Through workshops, students had opportunities to collaborate and network with other students from multiple colleges. Professional keynote speakers from businesses and industries emphasized the importance of the skills highlighted during this conference.

Admissions Coordinator Daphne Scott, Student Affairs Specialist Emily Jarrell, Special Services Advisor Jeannie Morris, and Special Needs Specialist Helen Thomas represented STC as SGA advisors. Daphne Scott and Emily Jarrell also serve as state GSGA advisors and conference organizers.

For more information on Southeastern Technical College, visit www.southeasterntech.edu or call (912) 538-3100 or (478) 289-2200.

Photos: (L-R) Southeastern Technical College Student Government Association Members Whitney Williams and Sabrina McLeod

HMGMA Donates Equipment for

EV Workforce Development

Hyundai Motor Group Metaplant America (HMGMA) donated tools to four technical schools in the Greater Savannah area to assist in the development of future electric vehicle professionals.

The kits, valued at around \$9,500 each, include automotive milli meters, multi meters, and other related tools. The tools were distributed to Coastal Pines Technical College, Ogeechee Technical College, Savannah Technical College, and Southeastern Technical College. The presentation of tool donation for Southeastern Technical College was held on March 20, 2024, in the Automotive Technology lab.

“These schools have been tremendous partners to us,” said Brent Stubbs, HMGMA Senior Manager of Learning and Development. “This is a small way for us to give back to the colleges

and fill a need for valuable equipment for their automotive labs. We recognized similar needs at all four colleges, and we are excited to invest in them as they help us develop a pipeline of future talent.”

All four technical colleges signed a Memorandum of Understanding with HMGMA in 2023 to offer the Electrical Vehicle Professional (EVP) Technical Certificate of Credit (TCC), which was

designed to prepare students for entry-level employment in the electric vehicle production industry. The 8-credit hour training focuses on safe and effective automotive shop operations,

automotive electrical principles, and the operation and service of electric vehicles. Graduates of the program are preferred for employment at HMGMA. More information on the EVP TCC is available at southeasterntech.edu.

Hyundai Motor Group Metaplant America (HMGMA) is Hyundai Motor

Group's first dedicated electric vehicle mass-production plant and will be located in Bryan County, Georgia. The new plant will boast a highly connected, automated, and flexible manufacturing system, which organically connects all elements of the EV ecosystem to realize customer value. The Georgia facility will become an intelligent manufacturing plant. All processes of production—order collection, procurement, logistics, and production—will be optimized utilizing AI and data. The innovative manufacturing system will also help create a human-centered work environment with robots assisting human workers.

Hyundai Motor Group is a global enterprise that has created a value chain based on mobility, steel, and construction, as well as logistics, finance, IT, and service. With about 250,000 employees worldwide, the Group's mobility brands include Hyundai, Kia, and Genesis. Armed with creative thinking, cooperative communication, and the will to take on any challenges, we strive to create a better future for all.

Piglet Teaches STC's Early Childhood Class

Southeastern Technical College had a celebrity on campus on March 11, 2024, in Swainsboro's Boatwright Auditorium. The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) program welcomed Piglet and several of Piglet's Inclusion Pack to teach that day's curriculum – defining diversity and inclusion in terms children can understand.

The Piglet Mindset lesson was about positivity and never giving up. Lesson plans and curriculum were structured around

Piglet's story.

Piglet, a chihuahua-dachshund mix, is a blind and deaf dog well-known nationwide. Piglet has been on CBS Evening News with Lester Holt, ABC's Good Morning America, the Hallmark Channel, and other networks. Piglet's story has also been in People Magazine, Psychology Today, Ink Publications, The Bark Magazine, and The Crossroads Magazine – to name a few.

Mrs. Kay Wilson, an Early Childhood Care and Education instructor at STC, connected with Piglet's mother, Dr. Melissa Shapiro, DVM, and was informed that Piglet would be touring from Maryland through Florida. Rather than a web meeting request, Dr. Shapiro generously offered to make a stop at Southeastern Tech's Swainsboro campus.

Dr. Shapiro and her husband, Warren, live in Connecticut and have eight rescued dogs and one rescued parakeet.

"I am very honored to have had Piglet and his brothers and sisters visit STC," said Mrs. Wilson. "Our ECCE students and childcare center have been learning about Piglet's story through his book *"Piglet Comes Home,"* which teaches acceptance, inclusion, and empathy. Piglet's mom is a veterinarian and is also a lifelong animal welfare advocate who visits classrooms and bookstores with Piglet and their other dogs to teach children about the Piglet Mindset program, which includes CASEL Competencies – The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning."

Piglet Mindset® Educational Program is a collection of lesson plans and educational materials to teach children to:

- Face challenges with a positive attitude
- Build on current skills with determination, resilience, and perseverance
- Accept individuals for who they are and include them despite their differences
- Show empathy and compassion towards others

- Be kind and considerate to all people and animals

Piglet was rescued from a hoarding situation in Georgia, along with his mother and three littermates, in 2017. When Piglet, at only 1.5 pounds, didn't respond to visual or auditory cues, the rescue quickly realized that Piglet was deaf and blind.

The Shapiros planned to foster Piglet until he found a forever home, but they turned into his forever home. Piglet was officially adopted in May 2017.

After months of screaming and severe separation anxiety, Piglet got into a routine of snuggling, playing with his dog siblings, taking walks down the street, traveling to house calls with his mom, and visiting his best human friends at the animal hospital.

In attendance were the Early Childhood Care and Education classes, the three-year-old class from STC's Childcare Center, local Head Start, where some of the ECCE students work, and STC faculty and staff. As part of Piglet's Positive in Pink Tour 2024, the children wore pink shirts and pink headbands to resemble piglet ears.

Piglet demonstrated spunk and showed the audience what it means to face fears. He uses the three senses he has to live a happy, meaningful life despite his disabilities.

Dr. Shapiro pointed out how Piglet's noise twitches, unlike most dogs, to best use his sense of smell. Piglet's nose also points up because "that's what blind dogs do," she says. She explained that tracking smells is a way Piglet learned to navigate their backyard and spoke of the importance of not adding items to the backyard now that Piglet understands his surroundings. With experience and trust, Piglet can now run and play without crashing into things. He can even find the stairs to their home by feeling the bottom slate with his paws. Once he feels the mat at the top of the stairs, he's using his sense of touch to know the door is there. Dr.

Shapiro says Piglet wasn't perfect at this for a while and needed help, but he learned to climb the stairs and get back inside.

Piglet's Inclusion Pack includes Annie, Evie, Zoey, Dean, Susie, Gina, and Lucy, and all were adopted with unique personalities. Georgie is the newest member of the pack and is another deaf and blind rescue.

Once Piglet had an understanding of how kind his new family was, he knew he would be safe. Dr. Shapiro showed the children video clips of how the other dogs have come to accept Piglet being a little unusual. For example, Zoey taps Piglet to let him know when she wants to play.

Piglet's book taught the children that tapping was a way to communicate with Piglet, but they also witnessed how blowing into Piglet's face was a form of communication.

Dr. Shapiro said, "We are having an amazing Southeast Piglet tour. The enthusiasm for our Piglet Mindset program and the warm welcome we have received everywhere we've been is truly humbling. The love for little Piglet and our other dogs is heartwarming. The children we've met love him because he's adorable and because he teaches them to be positive and kind. Many Piggy friends traveled for hours to meet us. They tell us how our little pink man brightens their day, helps them through illness, and inspires them to move forward from major life obstacles. Piggy is completely energized by all the action. It's beautiful to see him doing his thing!"

Dr. Shapiro made a promise that Piglet would have a meaningful and productive life – and he certainly has! Through Piglet's two books, he was introduced to the world and into classrooms. The Piglet Mindset® Educational Program is a free downloadable curriculum that teaches a growth mindset. The organization also raises awareness and funding for special needs dog rescue groups and other animal welfare causes.

Piglet's visit to Southeastern Tech was funded by Piglet International, Inc., a not-for-profit corporation.

"We have very generous supporters who donate to facilitate Piglet Mindset visits in schools. It's important to give credit and thank those who have contributed to our organization to make this possible," said Dr. Shapiro. "We donate books to classrooms and aim to donate \$1,000 each week to rescue organizations."

Piglet has attracted over 700,000 followers across social media platforms. Please visit www.pigletmindset.org for more information on the Piglet Mindset.

Photo: STC Early Childhood Care & Education Instructor Kay Wilson, Piglet's mother Dr. Shapiro, STC Dean of Business Technologies & Human Services Gina Robison

Southeastern Technical College Welding Instructor Receives AWS Educator of the Year Award

On March 4, Michael Crumpler was presented the Educator of the Year Award for the Atlanta Section of the American Welding Society (AWS) by Robert Trudelle, Chairman of the Atlanta Section.

Michael Crumpler has been a Welding and Joining Technology instructor at Southeastern Technical College's Vidalia Campus

for the past 24 years.

The Education/Meritorious/Service awards recognize individuals who have made notable contributions to the welding industry. From educators who have advanced welding knowledge to those who have exhibited outstanding service, these awards celebrate dedication, expertise, and the advancement of welding as both an art and a science.

The Section Educator Award is given as a means of recognizing high school, trade school, technical institute, or community college instructors whose teaching activities are considered to have advanced the knowledge of welding students in their respective schools.

"On behalf of AWS Atlanta Section, it is an honor to recognize Mr. Crumpler for his dedicated service to the welding industry. He is now among instructors for the state recognition," said Mr. Trudelle. "I cover the state, as a volunteer, and our job is to help these instructors in any way that we can. We are working on establishing a student chapter at STC. That would provide, even to high school students, nationwide industry connections."

Mr. Crumpler's Dual Enrollment class was in attendance for the presentation of the award.

"It is always an honor to be recognized by peers for your hard work. The American Welding Society has been an integral part of my career for the past 24 years," stated Crumpler.

Mr. Crumpler's welding career began right after high school, with his first welding job in Tennessee. Mr. Crumpler has worked for both small companies and large industrial contractors and has traveled the world. He has worked in most of the 50 states in America and some in South America.

While employed in the industry, Mr. Crumpler was a certified boilermaker welder, structural welder, and pipe welder. He

earned welding certifications in various welding processes. He also holds professional certifications through the AWS as a Certified Welding Educator (CWE), Certified Welding Inspector (CWI), and Certified Welding Supervisor (CWS).

Mr. Crumpler's welding biography has been published in a nationally known welding textbook: *Welding Principles and Applications 7th Edition*, published by Cengage and also in an internationally known welding magazine: *The World of Welding, Summer Edition 2011*, published by The Hobart Institute of Welding Technology.

Mr. Crumpler is an award-winning welding instructor. He was nominated for Instructor of the Year at Southeastern Technical College in 2006, 2012, 2016, 2017, and 2023. In 2017 and 2023, he won Instructor of the Year for Southeastern Technical College and placed in the Top Nine Finalists for the State of Georgia both years. He was most recently nominated for the Howard Adkins Memorial Instructor of the Year Award through the American Welding Society's Atlanta Section.

"Congratulations to our rock star, Michael Crumpler, for being recognized by his peers within his American Society of Welding District. Just further proof of what we, here at STC, already know," said Teresa Coleman, Vice President for Academic Affairs.

Mr. Crumpler is a graduate of Brewton Parker College, Heart of Georgia Technical College, and The Hobart Institute of Welding Technology.

For more information on American Welding Society, visit aws.org.

STC Students Win Five Medals at SkillsUSA Conference

The SkillsUSA Georgia State Leadership and Skills Conference has, for years, been an event at which Southeastern Technical College (STC) students prove their abilities and this year was the same.

Southeastern Tech students brought home two gold medals and three bronze medals. They are:

- Findlay Griner, from Metter – Gold Medal, Cosmetology
- Jamie Mallard, from Vidalia – Bronze Medal, Job Interview
- Heavenly Mincey, from Claxton, with model Estrella Hernandez, from Claxton – Gold Medal, Nail Care
- Harley Newsome, from Wrightsville, with model Whitney Messex, from Cobbtown – Bronze Medal, Esthetics
- Pricila Ortega, from Swainsboro, with model Erin Hood, from Swainsboro – Bronze Medal, Nail Care

Findlay Griner and Heavenly Mincey advance to the National SkillsUSA competition in Atlanta in June.

Griner said, “Participating in the SkillsUSA Cosmetology program was an invaluable experience that allowed me to show my skills and passion for the beauty industry. Being honored as a gold medalist not only validated my hard work, but also affirmed my dedication to excellence in my craft. It was a privilege to showcase my talents and represent my school, and I am grateful for the opportunity to be able to compete on the national level.”

Ortega said, “I am honored to say I earned a bronze medal for Southeastern Technical College. I learned many things and this experience was special to me. It was exhilarating being in a room full of talented people, demonstrating the future of

Georgia and what our Technical College System of Georgia has to offer.”

Newsome spoke of her experience. She said, “I would like to thank everyone who encouraged me through this amazing journey, especially my instructor Mrs. Hairr. Without her dedication to teaching me the material I needed for the esthetics portion, I would have never emerged from a second-semester Cosmetology student to a SkillsUSA bronze medalist! Makeup and skincare have always been a huge factor in my life. Even as a young girl, I experimented with different products and beauty looks. I knew this would become my career. I want to be a colorful inspiration. I want to show everyone of all ages that with hard work and dedication, there is no limit to what can be achieved. SkillsUSA helped me accomplish such a massive milestone in my life. I am beyond thankful and honored for the opportunity to have competed with many talented individuals. This pushed me to new heights that I never imagined.”

The other STC representatives and their areas of competition were:

- Cassie Taylor, from McRae – Barbering
- Kimberly Farmer, from Vidalia, with model Jamylett Hernandez, from Claxton – Esthetics
- Whitney Williams, from Vidalia – Job Skill Demo A
- Kimberly Register, from Lyons – Customer Service
- Abigail Phillips, from Mt Vernon – Early Childhood Care and Education
- Samuel Colston, from Kite – Diesel Equipment Technology
- Kenyuan Jackson, from Swainsboro – Diesel Equipment Technology

“Thanks so much to the faculty, staff, and students who went to Atlanta over a weekend and represented STC so well! Participating in this event takes time away from families and other priorities, so I am very grateful for the faculty and staff who chose to join in and share this learning experience

with their students,” said Teresa Coleman, Vice President for Academic Affairs.

SkillsUSA is the #1 workforce development organization for students, empowering them to become skilled professionals, career-ready leaders, and responsible community members.

Business Management instructor Tina Jernigan and Electrical Construction Technology instructor Tony Criswell lead Southeastern Technical College SkillsUSA as advisors.

Representing nearly 400,000 career and technical education students and teachers, SkillsUSA chapters thrive in middle schools, high schools, and college/postsecondary institutions nationwide as representatives working together to ensure that America has a skilled workforce. It helps students who are preparing for careers in trade, technical, skilled service, and health occupations excel toward their career goals.

America’s proud champion of the skilled trades, SkillsUSA State Conference was held at the Georgia World Congress Center.

For more information on SkillsUSA at STC, visit www.southeasterntech.edu or call (912) 538-3100 or (478) 289-2200.

Photos:

- 1) Findlay Griner Receives Gold Medal in Cosmetology at SkillsUSA Conference
- 2) Heavenly Mincey Receives Gold Medal in Nail Care at SkillsUSA Conference

Hinman Scholars Named in STC Dental Hygiene Program

On behalf of the Thomas P. Hinman Board of Trustees, Southeastern Technical College (STC) is pleased to announce that Dental Hygiene students Kelly Joseph and Aubree Swain have been selected as Hinman Scholars.

Kelly Joseph of Swainsboro and Aubree Swain of Baxley each received a \$500 scholarship.

The students were selected for the scholarships based on their scholastic performance, having the highest overall averages in their class.

Both students were Dual Enrollment students while in high school and both previously worked as dental assistants before their acceptance into the Dental Hygiene program at Southeastern Tech.

"Without Dual Enrollment, we wouldn't have had the success we've had at this age," said Joseph. "All the hard work, inside and outside of the classroom, is acknowledged by this prestigious honor and we are appreciative of what it means."

Joseph is a 2021 graduate from Emanuel County Institute. She said she chose dental hygiene as a career because she always noticed peoples' teeth and because dental hygienists generally have a nice work-life balance. "My dad worked out of town a lot and I didn't want to do that myself. I plan to work locally, so attending college locally made sense. I'm thankful STC has a Dental Hygiene program because I didn't have a backup plan. This was my first choice," said Joseph. "I am very thankful for all the support we've had from peers,

family, and instructors and appreciate the network and relationships I've built – another reason I plan to practice my profession close to home.”

Swain is a 2021 graduate of Appling County High School. Swain said she chose STC because she wouldn't have been able to afford moving off to attend college. “My mom isn't a hygienist, but her ability to make her own schedule showed me that I wanted a flexible work schedule. This avenue will also allow me to work alongside her and treasure days on the farm when I'm not working, just like I did during college,” said Swain.

“STC prepares us well for the work place, and in my case, debt free,” said Swain. “This scholarship will help with near-graduation expenses with our clinical board exam coming up in April and national written board exam in May.”

The non-profit Thomas P. Hinman Society has been granting scholarships to dental students since 1986, adding Dental Hygiene students in 1989. Since 2006, the Hinman Dental Society has provided more than \$11 million in total giving in scholarships and financial support to universities and institutions associated with dental education.

The Hinman Dental Society sponsored its first Thomas P. Hinman Dental Meeting in 1912 with the motto: Devotion to detail is the secret of success.

Born in 1870, Thomas Hinman graduated from Southern Dental College in Atlanta with his Doctor of Dental Surgery degree in 1891. The following year, he joined the faculty of his alma mater and became Professor of Oral Surgery. Dr. Hinman held high offices in many professional organizations including the appointment by President Woodrow Wilson as the U.S. Delegate and Honorary Chairman of the Section VIII of the Fourth International Congress of Dentists in London.

Today, the focus is still on providing the best possible

continuing dental education, not just for the dentists but also, the whole dental team. The Hinman Dental Society today is comprised of 800+ dentist members, primarily located in metropolitan Atlanta. The combination of outstanding education and hospitality ensures the position of the Hinman Dental Meeting as one of the top dental programs in the country. With the continued growth of meetings and exhibits, more than 13,000 dental professionals participated in the 2023 Thomas P. Hinman Dental Meeting.

Photos: Hinman Scholars Kelly Joseph and Aubree Swain

STC Foundation is Accepting Scholarship Applications

Southeastern Technical College (STC) Foundation is now accepting scholarship applications for Summer and Fall semesters. The deadlines to apply are:

- o Thursday, April 18, 2024 for Summer Semester
- o Thursday, July 25, 2024 for Fall Semester

Students who complete one application will be considered for all scholarships the student is qualified to receive. The scholarship application and a full listing of all scholarships available can be found on the Southeastern Technical College website at <https://www.southeasterntech.edu/foundation/>.

Scholarship packets, including the application, acceptance letter/proof of registration, letters of reference, and transcript(s), must be received by the deadlines listed above.

Completed scholarship packets can be mailed or hand delivered

to: Blythe Wilcox, Executive Director for Institutional Advancement, Southeastern Technical College, 3001 East First Street, Room 127, Vidalia, GA 30474.

STC Announces Student & Instructor of the Year

By Makaylee Randolph
Staff Writer, The Advance

Family, friends, and faculty gathered in the Tattnell Auditorium of Southeastern Technical College (STC) on Tuesday, January 23, as the college announced the recipients of the annual Georgia Occupational Award of Leadership (GOAL) and Rick Perkins Awards.

Being nominated for the GOAL Award is one of the highest honors which an STC student can achieve. To be eligible for nomination, a student must have completed at least 12 credit hours, have at least a “B” average, and be in good standing at the college. In addition to this, the student must recognize the impact of technical education on Georgia’s economic health, and must be willing to serve as an ambassador for technical education.

Each year, students are nominated by their instructors for this award, as a panel of judges helps to narrow down the nominations to the final four candidates. This year, those judges included Christian Burton – Pastor of the Oaks Baptist Church; Casandra Castro-Stephens – Dixon Management Group and Southeastern Technical College; Alysa Marsicano – City of

Lyons Community Liaison; Natorra Moody – Branch Manager of the Dr. Mark & Tonya Spivey Library; and Steven Toole – Lead Pastor of Cedar Crossing Church of God.

The 2024 GOAL Student is Jamie Mallard, a Business Management student with a focus in Human Resources, who was nominated by her instructor Tina Jernigan. Mallard spoke to the audience about her journey to STC, including several times which she faced adversity, to inspire others to hopefully choose to follow their dreams and make their own path.

Mallard opened her initial address with a quote, which read, “What you make of your life is up to you – every person creates his or her own reality. Authorship of your life is one of your absolute rights, yet so often, people deny that they have the ability to script the life they desire.”

She explained that upon graduation from high school, she never had plans to attend a technical school, as she was always told that you had to attend a four-year college to achieve success. Mallard attempted that path, as she enrolled in two different colleges within four years, took out thousands of dollars of student loans, commuted to school at least three times a week, and even got married and delivered her first son.

Yet, after the birth of her son, Mallard began experiencing postpartum depression, and often-extreme social anxiety. Soon after these challenges arose, a new one came: in 2012, Mallard’s mother was diagnosed with breast cancer, and Mallard was divorced a short time later. “My world was falling apart and I struggled daily with my depression and anxiety. Some days, when I looked in the mirror, I hated everything I saw, and some days, I saw nothing at all,” she remarked.

Because of these personal issues, she made the decision to withdraw from college. “I had no time for my dreams – they would have to wait,” she recounted.

Mallard worked hard for years, and ultimately was hired as an

onsite manager of a local staffing agency in Vidalia in 2014. "I learned a lot about business, human resources, and myself, and I'm proud of what I built during my time there," she emphasized.

While working at the agency, Mallard met and fell in love with her current husband, and the two were eventually married. Yet, more trials came for the couple, as Mallard's mother passed away due to breast cancer in April 2015, her aunt died of stomach cancer in June 2015, her grandma passed away in 2016, her mother-in-law died in 2017, and her first son lost his father in 2018.

Yet, 2019 brought a new wave of hope and happiness for the family. "2019 brought happiness. My husband and I purchased our first home, and in February 2020, I found out I was pregnant with my second son – a beautiful, brown-eyed baby boy," Mallard said.

COVID came, and the staffing and ecommerce industry struggled, just as many industries did during the pandemic. The company which she worked for lost many contracts and a lot of revenue, which motivated Mallard to look for other jobs – yet, every job she discovered required her to have some sort of postsecondary education. After realizing this requirement, she began to research her options to obtain a degree.

"I allowed fear and self doubt to keep me from moving forward for almost three years," she told the audience. "On a whim, in March of 2023, I reached out to Tina Jernigan, Business Management Advisor at STC, via email for her advice and thoughts on my best options. She encouraged me to apply for admission to the program. A degree in Business Management could be used in my current position, but would also open so many doors and opportunities for me in a variety of careers."

According to Mallard, while enrolled at STC, she has been accepted into the Leadership Greater Vidalia class, made the

President's List after being out of high school for over 20 years, and even received a scholarship from STC's Foundation. Yet, her greatest accomplishment has been being named a GOAL Award contender, and ultimately, the award winner.

"When I say STC has changed my life, I literally mean that," Mallard emphasized. "Through technical education, I chose to rewrite my story and I hope to be an inspiration to anyone who is afraid to take that first step to fulfilling their dreams. It is never too late to choose yourself – to be better for you, for your family, and for your community. I will be forever grateful to Southeastern Technical College for giving me a chance to pursue my dreams, for giving me hope, and for providing me with the tools and skills I need to be the author of my own life and to change my story."

She thanked her family, friends, instructors, counselors, and classmates all for the support, help, and encouragement they had provided throughout her educational journey, and stressed that she could not have achieved this success without them. "As you get older in life, it's hard to come by people who will stand by you through thick and thin. So, make sure when you are looking for those people, you find the people that will get down and dig in the trenches with you – that will support you and your dreams no matter how crazy they are," Mallard said.

"I did this for myself, and I did this for my family," she emphasized. "I'm a mom; I'm a wife; I'm a business manager; I'm a student. All of that has been made better by my time here at this college. Technical education is what makes the world go round." Mallard will now represent STC as a contender for the State GOAL Student Awardee, who will travel the state throughout the next year to represent the Technical College System of Georgia.

STC Rick Perkins Award Winner Sadia Ajohda will also represent the college in the race for the State Rick Perkins Awardee,

who will advocate for technical education at various levels throughout 2024.

The Rick Perkins Award for Excellence in Technical Instruction honors the Technical College System of Georgia's most outstanding instructors. The award is designed to recognize those teachers who make significant contributions to technical education through innovation in the classroom and leadership in their fields. Originally known as the Commissioner's Award of Excellence, this prestigious award was renamed the Rick Perkins Award in memory and honor of Thomas "Rick" Perkins, an instructor from West Georgia Technical College, who received the award prior to his untimely death.

To become the Rick Perkins Awardee, instructors must be nominated by their peers within their respective department at STC. The same judging panel used for the GOAL Award nominees judged the Rick Perkins Award nominees to determine the best possible finalists for the award.

This year, Biology Instructor Sadia Ajohda took home the title of STC Rick Perkins Awardee. During her acceptance speech, Ajohda looked back on the past, reminiscing about how she first was introduced to technical education, and how her journey led her to STC.

"The year was 2018 – November 12 to be exact – and I was sitting in a hospital room, holding my husband's hand in shock and numb, just watching all the tubes and machines hooked up to him," she recounted. "I remember begging God for a second chance. You see, Derek – he's a third degree blackbelt instructor, and he's been teaching martial arts for over 20 years. There was absolutely nothing wrong – he was in good shape and good health. It was just a normal routine medical checkup and the doctors found four clogged arteries."

Ajohda said that upon finding these clogged arteries, the doctors told her husband that he was a "ticking time bomb" and

refused to let him return home after his appointment, but rather began preparing him for an emergency quadruple bypass open heart surgery, which would take place that next morning.

The traumatic turn of events took Ajohda's mind back to their early days of marriage. "My mind went everywhere. One place which my thoughts went was back to Trinidad – that's where we're from, and 25 years ago, when Derek and I had just gotten married. My dad suffered a stroke, then later kidney failure. With [her father having] no insurance, Derek and I moved in with my parents to help [them] out financially – [yet] we couldn't make ends meet," she told the audience. "This led us to Polytechnic, our local technical college. It's a counterpart of Technical College System of Georgia – same mission, same concept. We registered, and they told us, 'You are not a student at risk – you are a student at promise.'"

This statement fueled the couple's determination and motivation to gain their education, as the pair graduated from Polytechnic, took the SAT, were awarded financial aid, moved to Georgia, and sought to continue to better their lives through postsecondary education and earning their Bachelors' Degrees.

"We worked at the college cafeteria, and the best part was we could finally pay for Dad's dialysis treatments," Ajohda explained. "After my Master's program, I tried out career paths. I knew my college cafeteria days would not make me famous on Food Network. I knew I had to have something that would bring meaning to my life – I had to find a purpose."

She eventually found that purpose while sharing her knowledge with students who were just like herself. "As a product of the technical college system, I know the foundation that it paves for our future. I knew where I needed to be. Here at STC, I found my passion," she emphasized. "[And] My hospital experience [with my husband] gave me a front seat view of my very own students."

While her husband was in the hospital, Ajohda leaned on the support of both her church family and her students, as aside from her immediate family, she has no other relatives in the area. During that time, her students not only took great care of Ajohda's husband, but of all the patients. "They were confident, they were passionate, they were successful – they were nursing their patients back to full recovery – and it's not because I was one of their professors," she shared.

Ajohda continued, "When COVID hit, our students rushed into the hospital and into the danger zones. Just like our hero firefighters, they rushed in to save and serve a perfect stranger. That's our own healthcare heroes. Watching them serve at the hospital, I was just swelling with pride and joy. What an impact to our community!"

"I am so proud of our students, and this technical college system, because here is where we live our motto. We push them to succeed sooner, and we dare them to do well," she concluded. "Thank you so much for your confidence in me."

Alongside Ajohda, four other finalists were recognized – Cosmetology Instructor Linda Hairr, Air Conditioning Technology Instructor Vince Scott, English Instructor Dr. Laquanda Thomas, and Medical Assisting Instructor Stephannie Waters.

STC Vice President of Academic Affairs Teresa Coleman spoke on the excellence of these instructors and the entire faculty at STC. "Teaching and learning are the heartbeats of Southeastern Technical College," she stated. "Without our faculty, we would not exist. I know, without a shadow of a doubt, that our faculty changes lives – one life at a time."

In addition to these finalists, several of the top GOAL Award contenders were also recognized at the ceremony, and given the opportunity to share a short speech on their paths which led them to STC.

The first GOAL Award finalist to share her thoughts on her technical college experience was Associate of Science in Nursing Student Samanta Dixon, who was nominated by Ginny Ennis. During her address, Dixon explained to the audience that she was born in Jamaica, but moved to Vidalia at a young age.

Dixon said she was inspired to work in healthcare – specifically, nursing – by two nurses who helped care for her in two of her most vulnerable moments in her life – an appendectomy and during delivery of her first child after the child unfortunately passed away. “Nurses were always my role models,” she told the audience.

She graduated from the Practical Nursing program and is currently enrolled in the ASN Bridge program. She works at the local Memorial Health Meadows Hospital, and even earned her first Daisy Award for excellence in patient care this past September.

GOAL Award Finalist Pricila Ortega, Cosmetology student nominated by Linda Hairr, also spoke to the audience about her path to technical education which is enabling her to pursue her passion while inspiring her daughter.

Ortega began by asking the audience a question. “Has there ever been a time that you wished you could escape reality?” she remarked. “Most people offer books, movies, or reality television – for me, it has always been school.”

Ortega loved school and learning, and knew it could give her the one thing she desired most: independence. Growing up, Ortega watched her mother be financially dependent on her father. “It was hard watching such a strong woman doing the best she could for her four kids. I knew I wanted to be the change,” she commented.

To be that change, Ortega moved out on her own in high school. Soon, life on her own became difficult, as she became pregnant

during her senior year. "I hated the thought of proving my parents right. I was a teen mom, and nowhere near leaving the town," Ortega explained. Yet, it was becoming a mother that inspired her to push her limits so that she may be a future inspiration to her daughter.

"Technical education has opened me up to new opportunities and showed me so many pathways. I have become more self-confident, resilient, and motivated. There is no stopping me now," she said. "I am proud to be one of the 34% of first generation Latinas to attend college, and I am proud to be someone that little Pricila would be proud of."

The last student to address the audience was Eric Wright, a Welding student who was nominated for the GOAL Award by Michael Crumpler.

During his address, Wright emphasized the character traits which STC had helped him learn, including how to lead others. "I'd never really considered myself as much of a leader – just more of a person that was always fine with helping those in need. Throughout the years, I learned that you should always be there to lend a hand and you never know who may need it," he told the audience. "STC has made me and others become great leaders and even better people. This school has changed many lives, and I'm proud to call the few I've met friends. The impact technical education has is tremendous and can change a community for the better."

Wright said he knew that welders were highly paid workers, so he initially sought to learn to weld for the financial benefit. Yet, after many hours of working on the craft, he fell in love with the task.

So, when a job ended and Wright was laid off, he turned to technical education. "As my parents told me, if you love something so much, you should go to school for it and become something. I did take this advice," he reminisced. "When the

day came for orientation, I knew this was a choice that I was going to have to give 100% on – there was no turning back.”

He spoke of his anxiety on his first day at the college, as he was nervous at the thought of doing something new. Yet, the staff and atmosphere of the school soon calmed his worries, and he fell into place. “Southeastern Tech made me feel like this was my second home. You end up in a class full of people that have the same interest, passion, and drive as you,” he emphasized. “I thoroughly enjoyed coming in to get my assignments done – I guess it is true that if you love what you do, you won’t work a day in your life.”

Wright credited the one-on-one experiences with his instructors for helping him to grow tremendously in his field, and thanked STC for empowering him to continue further in his career.

After hearing all of the speeches, STC President Larry Calhoun commented on the excellence of the students. “All the students are winners – especially these four this evening, but also the 2,500 that attended STC in the last year, and the 135,000 across the state that attended other technical colleges – because you are all making a difference in your lives and in your families’ lives,” he concluded.

Photos

2024 STC Rick Perkins Award for Excellence in Technical Instruction Winner Sadia Ajohda, STC President Larry Calhoun, and 2024 STC Georgia Occupational Award of Leadership Winner Jamie Mallard