ABAC President Begins 10th Year

For Dr. David Bridges, there’s no greater pleasure than diving inside the numbers and finding answers to questions which come his way in his position as president of ABAC. For the past two years, the numbers tell quite a story.

ABAC is the only college or university south of Macon in the University System of Georgia (USG) to experience an enrollment increase for the past two years.

“There are lots of reasons,” Bridges, who began his 10th year as president on July 1, said. “The primary reason is that we have an identifiable mission. We know who we are.

“Our enrollment went up because we had an increase in the number of students choosing the bachelor’s degrees in agriculture and natural resources. Our bachelor’s degrees in biology and business are doing pretty well also.”

President Bridges spoke at the groundbreaking for the laboratory sciences building on June 25.

Much has changed since Bridges stood on the front porch of Tift Hall on May 11, 2006 when he was selected by the Board of Regents of the USG to serve as the 10th president in the history of ABAC. On May 17, 2006, he returned to that same front porch to announce that ABAC had been granted state college status and would begin offering bachelor’s degrees.

That changed everything.

“The addition of bachelor’s degrees to the ABAC curriculum is the single biggest change during my tenure as president,” Bridges said. “Nothing else comes close.

“I think we hit it about right. We didn’t add a lot of bachelor’s degrees overnight. We raised our admissions standards. Now I think more of our students have a start-finish mentality. We have more students committed to getting a bachelor’s degree, and we certainly have more graduates. Our graduation rate is 200 per cent of the state college average.”

A record-breaking 409 ABAC students completed the requirements for graduation at the end of the spring term. A total of 117 graduates received bachelor’s degrees, shattering the previous high of 67.

“Scholarships have really helped the enrollment as well,”

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Brandon Reeder had always dreamed of being a head baseball coach. Now ABAC has made that dream come true.

After a year as interim coach of ABAC’s baseball Stallions, Reeder has been selected for the position of head baseball coach and academic support counselor at the institution.

“It’s always been a dream but I never expected it so soon,” the 26-year-old Reeder said. “During the past year, I have learned that it takes a lot of fortitude dealing with 18 and 19-year-olds who have much different interests that I do.”

One common interest for Reeder and the players is for the Stallions to become a competitive force on the diamond in the Georgia Collegiate Athletic Association.

“Our goals are going to go up,” Reeder, a 2006 Tiftarea Academy graduate, said. “We have the foundation laid. We want to win the conference year in and year out. With more success, we’ll have the better players come here, and we’ll continue to grow.

“Good people always want to come to ABAC because it’s such a good school. Quality players will begin to see that we want to be taken seriously in the conference every year.”

In his year as interim coach after Robert Morgan resigned in November of 2014, Reeder and the Stallions got everyone’s attention by bolting out to a 12-2 start in conference action. The team finished 27-30 overall and advanced to the quarterfinals of the conference tournament.

“We got cold at the end,” Reeder said. “Our pitchers were not throwing strikes. It’s a lot easier

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McLain.

he played for Tifton native Brian Southwestern Hurricanes where of baseball with the Georgia Reeder constantly improved his the Tiftarea Academy Panthers, last year. "little areas we can improve on from be our strength. There are a lot of and freshmen players coming in, he must replace his entire infield. "We’ve got some good transfer and freshmen players coming in," Reeder said. “Pitching is going to be our strength. There are a lot of little areas we can improve on from last year.”

After a standout career with the Tiftarea Academy Panthers, Reeder constantly improved his game on the hill in four years of baseball with the Georgia Southwestern Hurricanes where he played for Tifton native Brian McLain.

Utilizing a fastball which topped out in the upper 80s, Reeder set the school record for games pitched in during his career at Georgia Southwestern. During his senior season, the Hurricanes advanced to the finals of the Peach Belt conference tournament before losing to Columbus State. Reeder was the closer on the mound for three years.

"Now my arm’s ragged out but I’m still throwing batting practice every day," Reeder said with a laugh.

Reeder received a psychology degree from Georgia Southwestern and is now pursuing a graduate degree in kinesiology. His initial goal was to become a sports or clinical psychologist. He admits that he still gets a lot of practice in that field with the daily analysis of the veritable plethora of personalities on the Stallions.

Now he’s putting his mind and body to work this summer to get the ABAC baseball facilities upgraded.

“Complete with red carpet and limousines, it’s going to be done up right like a regular preview screening of a movie,” Ray said. “And it all happens right there in the heart of Fitzgerald.”

Ray said it’s a one-night only event, and the possibility of future showings at other theaters is still in the planning stages.

“We have a tentative plan to shop it to a couple of major distributors but since this is the first major film to be completed by this company, it has to prove itself first,” Ray said.

Ray plays the part of Jack Gibbons, a retired police officer pressed back into service. The faith-based movie allows Ray’s character to serve in a mentoring

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**Movie Debut for ABAC’s Brian Ray on July 11**

For the past 40 years, acting on stage in theatre productions has been the adrenaline that fueled the fire of life for Dr. Brian Ray. The faculty member in the School of Liberal Arts at ABAC has been a part of over 50 productions.

In all that time in front of the lights, Ray has never seen his image on the big screen in a movie theater. That’s about to change. Ray occupies a pivotal role in the Sidney Bryant film, “Surrender,” which premieres on July 11 at the Grand Theatre in Fitzgerald.

“Working on a movie is totally different from working on a play,” Ray said. “The acting takes place on location instead of on a stage. There is also limited rehearsal. Actors learn their lines on their own before coming to the set. Then there are often changes to the script before the actual filming begins. Memorizing lines and dealing with the changes is a real challenge. Fortunately, most of the scenes are relatively short.”

Ray said the preview screening of “Surrender” is open to the public with tickets available at a cost of $12 for adults and $8 for children. Tickets can be purchased at the Grand Theatre or at www.sidneybryant.com. Doors open at 5 p.m., and the screening begins at 6 p.m.

**Alumni Association Hosts Ice Cream Social for Alumni at TRMC**

The ABAC Alumni Association will host a “Stallions and Scoops” Ice Cream Social for ABAC alumni from 2-4 p.m. on July 9 at the Tift Regional Medical Center (TRMC) Dining Room A. ABAC Alumni Director Lynda Fisher said the event recognizes ABAC alumni involved in the health care industry for their dedicated service. Any ABAC alumnus who works at TRMC is welcome to come by, have some ice cream, and get an update on ABAC. For more information, contact Fisher at (229) 391-4900.

Reeder continued from page 1 to pitch when you’re ahead in the count.”

Darton beat South Georgia in the finals of the conference tournament. Ironically, the Stallions won three of the four times ABAC played those teams in the regular season.

For Reeder, a former pitcher himself, it all starts on the mound. He has seven pitchers coming back from this year’s squad but he must replace his entire infield.

“After a standout career with the Tiftarea Academy Panthers, Reeder constantly improved his game on the hill in four years of baseball with the Georgia Southwestern Hurricanes where he played for Tifton native Brian McLain.

**Reeder continued from page 1**
Bridges said, “We had about $300,000 worth of scholarships when I started and now we have just shy of $1,000,000 worth of private financial assistance.”

With nine years of his presidency behind him, Bridges reflected on how necessity has altered his presidential style a bit. “We have been through some austere budget years,” Bridges said. “I would have liked to have spent more time on leadership and less time on management but we have a much smaller number of non-academic personnel that we did at one time. The number of bureaucratic demands has increased exponentially.

“We don’t have the autonomy we once had. Now everybody from the federal government to the state government to accrediting agencies to the Board of Regents to the Supreme Court tells us what we need to be doing. I’ve had to become more of an operational president because of that. In tough times, you just manage through it. I don’t necessarily like that but right now we’re operating in that type of environment.”

As Bridges looks to the start of the 2015 fall semester on Aug. 12, he hopes to focus on the implementation of a new strategic plan for the college. The cornerstone of the plan involves making sure ABAC graduates are prepared for the real world.

“Our value is cast in preparing students for life,” Bridges, the only ABAC president who was also an ABAC graduate (Class of ’78), said. “We have to keep mentoring, coaching, and placing students in internships. Unless we keep doing things of that nature that distinguish us, we’re just like everyone else. We have to remain student-focused.”

The list of ABAC accomplishments during Bridges’ tenure is a long one. In 2006, ABAC opened the Health Sciences building. In 2007, ABAC added the ABAC Lakeside housing facility and the soccer field. ABAC celebrated its 100th birthday in 2008 with a year-long centennial celebration. In 2009, the ABAC academic curriculum was divided into six schools of study, and deans were selected to head each school. In 2010, ABAC took over the operation of the Georgia Museum of Agriculture and Historic Village. In 2012, a USG report said that ABAC had an economic impact of $281,563,172 on Tift and surrounding counties.

In 2013, the college completed the Historic Front of Campus renovation, which changed the physical look of the three original buildings on campus, the front lawn, and the area behind Tift, Lewis, and Herring halls. In recent news, ABAC broke ground on a new $8.5 million laboratory sciences building on June 25.

Not many presidents enjoy double digit tenures at their respective institutions. Bridges feels fortunate to be in that group. But it’s obvious he is still hungry to climb another hill or two to see what’s on the other side before his time at ABAC ends.

“My hope is that I realize it’s time for me to go before others let me know it’s time for me to go,” Bridges said with a chuckle. “I’m not looking for another executive academic position. I am beginning to consider what my post-ABAC life will be like. I will not be here forever but I do have a few more things I want to accomplish.”
From Boston to Buckingham Palace, ABAC offers a plethora of 2016 travel destinations in cooperation with Collette Vacations.

Open to anyone with the desire to travel, the trips feature an educational experience loaded with fun and adventure. For more information on any of these excursions, interested persons can visit the ABAC travel web site at www.abac.edu/travel, contact ABAC travel coordinator Lynda Fisher at lfisher@abac.edu, or call (229) 391-4900. Prices for all trips listed are per person rates and based on double occupancy.

The 2016 spring travel season begins on April 6 with a seven-day trip to explore the amazing city of London including stops at Stonehenge, Big Ben, Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, Salisbury, and Buckingham Palace. Travelers will stay at the Hilton in London for the duration of the trip, saving a lot of packing and unpacking. Experiencing a meal at a traditional pub will also be a part of the excursion. The trip cost of $2,859 includes seven meals, hotel accommodations, and round-trip airfare. Optional experiences for an additional cost include a tour of Windsor Castle and tea in the orangery of Kensington Palace. The deadline to book this trip is Oct. 17.

From June 17-24, 2016, adventure-goers can witness the beauty of nature with the Northern National Parks excursion. Travelers will visit the Park City, home of the 2002 Winter Olympics. Travelers will also stop in Jackson Hole, Wyo., and tour Salt Lake City, Utah.

The $2,609 price includes 10 meals, hotel accommodations, and round-trip airfare. Optional experiences include white water rafting and lunch in Jackson Hole, a wildlife scenic float and lunch, and a tour and family search experience at the Mormon Tabernacle topped off by a Temple Square Garden Dinner. The deadline to book this trip is Dec. 10, 2015.

In the fall of 2016, ABAC and Collette Vacations will offer a trip to sunny Portugal from Sept. 2-11. The 10-day visit includes the destinations of Cascais, Lisbon, Sintra, Obidos, Fatima, Evora, Monsaraz, Algarve, Sagres, Lagos, Faro, and Azeitao. Within these cities, tourists will be treated to a cooking demonstration, two winery tours, a stay in the Alentejo Countryside, and a visit to Jeronimo’s Monastery and five United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) sites.

Optional excursions for additional costs per activity include dinner at Cozinha Velha Restaurant in Queluz Palace, a coastal cruise with an Algarvian Cave Expedition, or a visit to the Portimao Museum and dinner. The price includes hotel accommodations, round-trip airfare, and 14 meals for $3,759. The deadline to book this trip is Feb. 25, 2016.

From Oct. 4-11, 2016, travelers can immerse themselves in the rich history and beauty of the Islands of New England. This trip spotlights destinations across Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Stops of interest include the summer home of the Vanderbilts in Newport, a tour of Boston’s historic sites, a visit to a cranberry bog and Plymouth Rock, a complete Thanksgiving feast, a cruise on Cape Cod to Martha’s Vineyard, a lobster dinner, and a choice of whale watching or walking the scenic sand dunes of Cape Cod. This trip includes hotel accommodations, round-trip airfare, and 11 meals for $2,789. The deadline to book this trip is March 28, 2016.

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role for another police officer who is struggling to rediscover his religious beliefs.

Filming the movie was quite an eye-opening experience for Ray, who directs the Baldwin Players Theatre Troupe at ABAC and teaches classes ranging from composition to world literature to fundamentals of acting.

“There’s usually a quick walk-through of the scene to be filmed, and then the director starts the cameras,” Ray said. “Usually, it takes several tries to get the scene right and to get enough camera angles.

“Virtually nothing is filmed in the order that it appears in the movie. The scenes get filmed in the order that locations, actors, and other logistics are available so everything jumps around a lot.”

Ray said this presents a challenge for the makeup artists, particularly when they are responsible for actors who “age” during the movie.

“One evening we shot a scene from the early part of the film and then one from the latter part because the location was only available for one night,” Ray said.

“I got ‘aged’ by the makeup people between scenes.”

Ray, who has taught at ABAC for the last 10 years, said he enjoys both film and the stage but it’s hard for him to turn his back on his first love.

“I enjoy both, and I will continue to work in both mediums if I can,” Ray said. “My first love is the stage because of the live audience and the immediate interaction the actors get from the audience. However, the intensity and amazing possibilities of film make it very attractive.”
Jimmy Felton Retires After 22 Years at ABAC

Felton served as an educator in a variety of ways prior to coming to ABAC. He taught agriculture at the high school level and worked as both a grounds superintendent and horticulturist in Alabama and Georgia.

Felton faced some challenges in his years at ABAC.

The biggest challenge has been learning all the ins and outs of dealing with such a large operation like ABAC and the state to accomplish our horticulture department goals,” said Felton. “It has never been a dull moment.”

When asked about his fondest memories, Felton said they all center around one aspect of the college, its people.

Felton thought the time was right to retire.

“I want to possibly try some new things,” Felton said. “My granddaughter is also moving to Tifton. She is three and wants Papaw to take care of her.”

Museum of Agriculture Helps at Mississippi Museum

For any museum housing one-of-kind relics and treasured memories of the past, there can be no more dangerous an enemy than flames engulfing an irreplaceable collection which took years to put together.

That’s why Polly Huff, assistant director and curator of the Georgia Museum of Agriculture and Historic Village at ABAC, was quick to respond to a nationwide disaster relief call last November.

“The Association for Living History, Farm, and Agricultural Museums asked museum professionals from across the nation to respond to a tragedy in Jackson because of a devastating fire at the Mississippi Agriculture and Forestry Museum,” Huff said.

For three days, Huff and other volunteers assisted with artifact triage, restoration, and relocation.

With the help of a photographer and a local volunteer, she processed over 500 artifacts affected by the fire.

The fire started in the facility’s animal barn from a hay bale that was too close to a light fixture.

“If it hadn’t been for such quick response, the damage would have been more widespread,” Huff said.

“Folks in Florence fifteen miles away saw smoke from the fire. Crews battled the blaze for more than three hours to keep it from spreading to the historic village.”

Officials estimate that damage to the site could total $2.5 million. There was no loss of life although one employee suffered minor injuries while releasing animals.

“The good news is that the Museum re-opened three weeks after the disaster,” Huff said. “They will continue to slowly rebuild and restore their beautiful site, which is almost an identical copy of our Georgia Museum of Agriculture with a church, school house, blacksmith forge, general store, Masonic Lodge and doctor’s office.

“One thing obvious to anyone who participated in the recovery effort was how the Jackson community came together to assist the Museum staff, and how this heartbreaking loss of history heightened everyone’s appreciation for this unique and special museum.”

Huff said every volunteer lauded the quick reaction of the local fire department, whose personnel saved the entire site from being devoured by the flames.

The Mississippi Commissioner of Agriculture’s office has been instrumental in the recovery effort, and many of the state offices in Jackson and the surrounding areas allowed their employees to assist with the cleanup efforts as a part of their work day.

“I was glad to represent ABAC and Georgia’s Museum of Agriculture in lending a helping hand to a sister museum,” Huff said. “I think because of this fire and seeing this damage, I have an even greater appreciation for what we have here in our living history museum.”

Pictured (l-r): Felton, Dean of the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources Jerry Baker and Lorie Felton during a retirement reception.

“The fondest memories I have are all of the students I have gotten to know and working with all the different people here at the college,” said Felton. “I have had the opportunity to work with some extremely intelligent people over the years.”

Felton thought the time was right to retire.

“I want to possibly try some new things,” Felton said. “My granddaughter is also moving to Tifton. She is three and wants Papaw to take care of her.”