Savannah Leigh Brown, a nursing major from Wray, received the prestigious George P. Donaldson award at the spring commencement ceremony on Thursday at ABAC.

“The family-like atmosphere at ABAC has never ceased to amaze me,” Brown said in her Donaldson Award application. “When I first stepped foot on this campus, I was greeted with open arms, friendly smiles, and most importantly, by my name. I have gained lifelong friendships and learning experiences in education and life that will stay with me for the rest of my days.”

Named to both the President’s List and the Dean’s List, Brown earned distinguished, superior, and honor student status during her ABAC career. The nursing degree she received at Thursday’s ceremony was actually her second diploma from ABAC. She graduated with honors from ABAC in 2012 with her associate degree in speech communications. Besides her stellar academic achievements in the classroom, Brown excelled in extracurricular activities including four years of service as an ABAC Ambassador where she represented the college at civic club speaking engagements, at high school recruiting events, at the Sunbelt Agricultural Exposition and at a special visit by Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue. She was also selected by the college administration for the 2010 Georgia Women’s Leadership in Public Service Institute.

Brown was crowned Ms. ABAC in 2010, opening the door for a WALB-TV interview and a front cover photo on the “Tifton Scene” magazine. Active in the Phi Theta Kappa honor society and the Baptist Collegiate Ministries, Brown expanded her leadership skills this year by being selected as president of the ABAC chapter of the Georgia Association of Nursing Students.

Beyond her ABAC accomplishments, Brown has volunteered for the Tift County Relay for Life and was named Miss Tift County Relay for Life in 2010. Her willingness to volunteer has made a difference at Satilla Baptist Church, where she is a Sunday School teacher for 3-5 year-olds. The daughter of Wesley and Kim Brown from Wray is also the co-founder of Pearl Ministries, established in 2011.

The guest speaker at the event was Coleman Ruiz, a former United States Navy SEAL. Ruiz encouraged the students to challenge themselves in several different areas including functional excellence, physical and mental toughness, and teamwork and leadership.

“You must ask yourself are you just doing things or are you doing the things that help you achieve what you really want out of life,” Ruiz said. “I want you to be among the elite but not an elitist.”

A total of 319 students completed their requirements for degrees from ABAC this semester. Sixty-five students received bachelor’s degrees.
When Kay Parten Wylie started classes at ABAC in September of 1955, she had no idea that it would take 59 years to get her degree.

It’s a story in perseverance that ended Thursday when Director of Public Relations Emeritus Mike Chason called the names of over 300 students participating in the ABAC spring commencement ceremony and the name of one who was not able to be present, Kay Parten Wylie.

“I had such a glorious time going to ABAC,” Wylie, now 76 years old, said. “It’s a really special place.”

Wylie graduated from high school in Sylvester in the spring of 1955. She packed up her belongings and moved to ABAC to live in Creswell Hall for the fall quarter. She didn’t know that she was only a year away from marrying her first husband.

“At the end of the first year, I married a young man I had met at ABAC,” Wylie said. “He had picked up some courses at ABAC but he was going to the University of Georgia. So we got married and moved to Athens.”

Wylie later completed her bachelor of arts degree in English from Valdosta State. She came ever so close to finishing her graduate degree from the same institution but fate intervened.

“I chose to take 15 extra hours instead of writing a thesis,” Wylie said. “I only had one and one-half pages to finish typing when my mother got very sick.”

Wylie did get that master’s degree at a later time in her life from Georgia Southwestern. But she never got her associate degree from ABAC until she called the ABAC Registrar’s Office to ask about transferring coursework from Valdosta State to finish out her ABAC requirements.

“They were very helpful,” Wylie said. “It was really easy. I just started thinking about it and realized how much I wanted a degree from ABAC.”

Wylie has tremendous ties to ABAC since her mother, Hazel Bickerstaff, was a nurse at the college during the 60s and her brother, Ted, was enrolled in the forestry program. Her son, Joe, also took classes.

“Ted really admired Dean (Vernon) Yow,” Wylie said. “So did Mother. In fact, Dean Yow appointed her Acting Dean of Women at ABAC one summer.”

During her working career, Wylie taught English at Tift County High School and Worth County High School.

“I left Tifton because the building in Sylvester was one story and air-conditioned,” Wylie said. “Plus Sylvester was my hometown.”

Wylie did not participate in Thursday’s commencement ceremony because her physical condition limits her mobility. But she is still very familiar with the ABAC campus since she lives only three blocks away.

“I ride out there almost every day,” Wylie said. “It’s such a beautiful campus.”

Made even more beautiful by the fact that Wylie now has a diploma from the college she fell in love with 59 years ago.

Kay Parten Wylie was pictured as a freshman in the 1956 ABAC yearbook. She now has her ABAC diploma 59 years after she started classes at ABAC in the fall quarter of 1955.

Bobbie Baldree retirees after 30 years of service to ABAC. She began working at ABAC in 1983 as Senior Secretary in the Office of Minority Advising/Upward Bound and in 1987 transferred to the Office of Development (currently College Advancement) where she served as Administrative Secretary. She was also the secretary for ABAC Foundation until 1998 and the bookkeeper until 2010. Since then, she has been an Administrative Associate and a vital team member in our office, as well as serving as ABAC’s Information Center and Facilities Scheduling Coordinator.

Pictured: (I-r) Sherrie Nalls, Lynda Fisher, Jodie Snow, Sue Dees, Gloria Sulkowski (front) Baldree.

Forest Lakes Golf Club Gets New Irrigation Equipment

Forest Lakes Golf Course Superintendent Austin Lawton (right) presents a plaque of appreciation to Dirk Hessman, the Golf Field Repairs/Technical Service representative from Ewing Irrigation for his company’s work in helping to install new irrigation equipment donated by Hunter Golf Irrigation at the course. Tifton ophthalmologist Larry Moorman and his wife, Debra, donated the nine hole course to the ABAC Foundation in 2002. The course is open to the public on a daily basis but is also used as a teaching laboratory for ABAC students in the turfgrass and golf course management bachelor’s degree program.

ABAC Birthdays

15 Lissette Badillo 21 Keisha Spears 23 Gloria Sulkowski 17 Betty McCorvey 23 Nicholas Urquhart 18 Jeannie Paulk