ABAC President Makes $1 Million Commitment to Veterans

One year ago, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College President David Bridges pledged to raise $100,000 for a Veterans Enrichment Fund on the ABAC campus. On Thursday, he decided to raise the amount tenfold.

“Last year on this day, I told you that we would raise $100,000 for veterans on the ABAC campus,” Bridges told the audience at the annual reception to honor the recipients of the Harold Bascom “Pinky” Durham, Jr., scholarships in Tift Hall. “My wife, Kim, and I showed our commitment by pledging the first $20,000.

“I am here to tell you today that we have raised that $100,000, and now I want to let you know of a brand new commitment. I want to raise $1,000,000 for a veterans’ endowment fund on the campus of Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College.”

Bridges said the campaign would stretch over several years, and he did not put a time limit on it.

“We are doing this because I want future generations of ABAC students to know that we respect the honor, the integrity, and the valor of those who serve in the armed forces of our country,” Bridges said. “We will continue to invest in those who invested so much in us. We must not forget that some of them invested their lives for our freedom.”

During the past year, ABAC has followed a plan to recognize the accomplishments of veterans on the campus. The Veterans Initiative includes a new Veterans Center in the J. Lamar Branch Student Center, a student veterans’ organization, recognition as a Purple Heart College, recognition as a Military Friendly College, free tutoring for veterans beyond the normal tutoring hours, and advanced preferred registration for veterans.

Bridges thanked Jessica Swords, the director of student accounts and veterans certifying official at ABAC.

To culminate the celebration of 50 years of nursing at ABAC, Suzette Cofer Alexander will be the guest speaker at the ABAC spring commencement ceremony on Thurs. at 10 a.m. in Gressette Gym.

Alexander was part of the first graduating class of nurses from ABAC. In 1966, ABAC took over the Nurse Training Program at Norman College. Alexander was one of five students who transferred to ABAC’s program.

“As student nurses in training we were assigned charge nurse positions on the medical surgical floors,” Alexander said. “The nursing supervisor would spot check our medications before they were given to patients, and we spent a lot of time preparing instruments and sterilizing equipment for patient care. Our nurses’ notes were done on paper. Nothing was disposable; this was before computers, plastic and disposable items.”

Alexander later continued her education at California State University in Sacramento, Calif., where she earned her bachelor’s degree in nursing in 1976. In 1982 she went on to complete her master’s degree in nursing from Chico State University in Chico, Calif. Over the course of her nursing career from 1967-1990, Alexander worked as a staff nurse, nurse manager, nursing supervisor, ICU Clinical Instructor, Associate Chief Nursing Service, and Chief of Nursing Service in the Veterans Administration.

At the Veterans Administration, Alexander served as a consultant on national and regional levels in regard to patient falls, medication errors, staffing effectiveness and facility patient care monitoring. She increased awareness of the vital role nurses play in health care research with her involvement to promote patient safety and improve patient care guidelines.

For 15 years, Alexander served as the Performance Improvement Coordinator for Nursing Service at the Audie L. Murphy Division in San Antonio, Texas. She has also served as an expert for the Department

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Tift County High School senior Erin Fowler was awarded the Harold Bascom “Pinky” Durham, Jr., Scholarship on April 28 during the third annual Carry The Load Step-Off event at ABAC. ABAC President David Bridges said Fowler is the second recipient of the scholarship, which was initiated last year. Kevin Joachin, now an ABAC freshman rural studies writing and communications major, received the award in 2015 and had his scholarship renewed for another year at the ceremony.

Fowler, the daughter of Stan and Tammy Fowler, served in the Tift County Air Force Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (AFJROTC) throughout her high school career. She rose through the ranks to become a Cadet Major. Fowler received the Reserve Officer Association Medal during her junior year and this year she was the recipient of the Daughters of the American Revolution Award.

Four faculty and staff members from the School of Nursing and Health Sciences at ABAC will join the ABAC students taking part in the Carry The Load (CTL) National Relay this year. They will serve as medics in various locations across the East Coast.

The goal of Carry The Load is to restore the true meaning of Memorial Day by connecting Americans to the sacrifices of our military, law enforcement, firefighters, and rescue personnel. Carry The Load was established in 2011 by former Navy SEALS Clint Bruce and Stephen Holley.

ABAC nurses taking part in the Eastern leg of the CTL relay are Kim Baldwin, Tammy Carter, Carmen Counts, and Cindia Dubravcic. Baldwin will assist in the CTL relay in Washington, D.C., Carter will travel to Nashville, Tenn., Counts will help out in Boston, Mass., and Dubravcic will lend aid in Atlanta.

Involvement by personnel from the School of Nursing and Health Sciences came about via an e-mail from Troy Spicer, dean of the school, looking for volunteers to serve as medics.

“In the position of medics, we will provide medical needs of our Carry The Load team but we will also serve as encourager, motivator, team walking member, and mother,” Carter said.

Carter chose to participate in the National Relay after taking part in ABAC’s Step-Off event for the past two years and serving as a board member on the college’s CTL campaign. It is a labor of love for her due to the long history of military service within her family. Her father retired from the Air Force, and Carter served one enlistment in the same branch. But her biggest reason for taking part in the National Relay is the fact that her twin sons are both presently on active duty in the Air Force.

Dubravcic adds, “I too am a ‘God and Country’ kind of girl. I have always had a soft spot for our military, police, EMTs, etc. My son is a Marine, and I served as a Naval Nurse Reservist. I also like being around young people, so I am looking forward to the experience. I am sure I will never forget this trip.”

Eleven ABAC students will participate in the National Relay that starts at West Point, N.Y., and culminates on Memorial Day in Dallas, Tex.

For more on the CTL National Relay, go to www.carrytheload.org.

Fowler Receives Scholarship Named for Medal of Honor Recipient

Tift County High School senior Erin Fowler was awarded the Harold Bascom “Pinky” Durham, Jr., Scholarship on April 28 during the third annual Carry The Load Step-Off event at ABAC.

ABAC President David Bridges said Fowler is the second recipient of the scholarship, which was initiated last year. Kevin Joachin, now an ABAC freshman rural studies writing and communications major, received the award in 2015 and had his scholarship renewed for another year at the ceremony.

Durham was a resident of Tifton and an ABAC alumnus. He gave his life serving his country in the Republic of Vietnam with the 1st Infantry Division on Oct. 17, 1967. He was honored posthumously with the Medal of Honor in a presentation to his mother, Grace Durham Jolley, on Oct. 30, 1969.

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Within the Tift County AFJROTC, Fowler has held offices including Foxtrot Flight Sergeant and Personnel Non-Commission Officer in Charge during her junior year. She now holds the offices of Foxtrot Flight Commander, Personnel Officer in Charge, First Group Commander, and Drill and Ceremonies Officer in Charge as a senior.

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For more on the CTL National Relay, go to www.carrytheload.org.
Taylor Martin wrote her name in the history of ABAC this week when she accepted the challenge as the first president of the Student Government Association to serve two terms. “I am thrilled to be serving my second term as SGA President and seeing so many great things at our institution get accomplished,” Martin said. “Knowing that I am a part of that is so humbling, and it gives me time to work on tasks that may take a while to come through. If I wasn’t getting a four-year degree here, I couldn’t serve two terms or be able to contribute as much as I have to ABAC.”

The diversified agriculture major from Johnson County is looking forward to what the new academic year has in store for SGA and the students of ABAC. “My plans for the coming year include speaking at freshman orientation, convocation, Stallion Days, Honors Day, and other highly visible events to let students know that we are here to represent them and their voice,” Martin, the daughter of Rodney and Jan Martin, said. “I also look forward to learning more about Board of Regents policy and assisting administration in enforcing that policy. And of course, I can’t wait to have a hand in our ‘Destination ABAC’ strategic plan and watch it unfold.”

Martin said the SGA had a lot of success this year. SGA members were able to reach students during Campus Safety Week in November and have plans to do that event again this fall. A more involved Town Hall meeting with ABAC President David Bridges is also on Martin’s agenda. Another goal is for ABAC to serve as the host for a Board of Regents Student Advisory Council conference. “I want the student body presidents from colleges and universities all over the state to see everything that ABAC has to offer and why we love it here,” Martin said. “It would be a great learning experience for everyone.”

During her high school career, Martin held numerous leadership positions in FFA, 4-H, and Student Government. She has also been active as a member of several organizations at ABAC. Martin was bitten by the political bug during her first semester at ABAC when she visited the State Capitol with the ABAC Collegiate Young Farmers program. While there she discussed current issues with members of the State Senate, Commissioner of Agriculture Gary Black, and several lobbyists.

Martin says that it is essential to be engaged in campus life outside of the four walls of a classroom. She also firmly believes in building relationships between students and faculty and recognizes that every accomplishment is a team effort. “We have a wonderful team of dedicated students who are going to be a huge asset in getting things done on the campus,” Martin said. “I am looking forward to a great year.”
Three students at ABAC recently took a giant step forward in their careers in agriculture by passing the Certified Crop Advisor certification examination. Zachary Deas from Jennings, Fla., Taylor Newsome from Moultrie, and David Daughtry from Harlem completed The Certified Crop Advisor program of the American Society of Agronomy. All three students are majoring in the Diversified Agriculture bachelor’s degree program at ABAC.

Dr. Ray Smith, an ABAC associate professor who is Head of the Department of Agriculture, said the three students strengthened their resumes considerably by passing the 250-question examination.

“The certification testifies to the students’ agronomic and pest management knowledge,” Smith said. “Many companies in the crop production side of agriculture encourage and/or require their employees to obtain Certified Crop Advisor status.

“We felt it would benefit our students if they could pass the tests prior to entering the job market. Although the exams are only a part of the certification process, they represent the biggest hurdle for most individuals.”

According to the Certified Crop Advisor website, the certification was established in 1992 to provide a benchmark for practicing agronomy professionals in the United States and Canada. Farmers and employers prefer to work with Certified Crop Advisors because they have demonstrated they have the commitment, education, expertise, and experience to make a difference.

“Employers have told us that a prospective employee who is already a Certified Crop Advisor would have a definite advantage over non-certified applicants,” Smith said. “The students also have to have job experience before they can become fully certified.”

Smith advises the ABAC Agronomy Club along with Dr. Justin Ng and Trey Davis. Deas, Newsome, and Daughtry are all members of the organization, which promotes the certification as one of its focal points.

The three ABAC students join more than 13,000 professionals in the largest, most recognized agriculturally-oriented certification program in North America. The program’s professional standards are widely respected by industry, academia, and government.

Stallion Baseball Team Recognizes Alumni and Rededicates Stallion Field

On April 23 ABAC Stallion Baseball alumni were invited back for a rededication of the field and reunion tailgate. Baseball has been an ABAC tradition since 1931 and many former players were recognized during this event. Recent improvements to the baseball field were celebrated including new scoreboard, bleachers and press box. Fundraising efforts for future improvements to dugouts (including restrooms for the athletes and public), batting cages, and backstop were also showcased. Chuck Scarborough, class of 1976 and current President of the ABAC Alumni Association, threw out the first pitch. The Stallions close out the regular season with home games against South Georgia on Thursday at 6 p.m. and Saturday at 1 p.m. Pictured: Stallion Baseball Alumni and current sponsors were recognized prior to the start of the game.

Students Participate during ‘A Day in the Woods’

The ABAC Wildlife and Forestry Clubs assisted with the "A Day in the Woods" event at the Gaskins Forest Nature Center in Alapaha. The Wildlife Club had stations dedicated to animal tracks, animal skin and skull identification, aquatic insects and tadpoles, and carnivorous plants, while the Forestry Club conducted mini-burns on forest fuels and archery. The event was a tremendous success, attended by an estimated 300 people. Evening activities included a nature walk led by Dr. Vanessa Lane and an astronomy session.
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ABAC, for her diligence in supporting students who are veterans on campus. In 2015, she was named the Gold Level recipient of the Chancellor’s Service Excellence Award for an Outstanding Individual for her work by University System of Georgia Chancellor Hank Huckaby.

“My grandfather is a veteran,” Swords said. “I try to make sure we take care of all their campus needs. As civilians, we should show our respect to veterans. It’s the least we can do. I think of the veterans on the ABAC campus as my students.”

In 2015, Bridges announced that a museum will be established on the ABAC campus in honor of Durham, a former Tifton resident and an ABAC alumnus. He said plans are progressing toward bringing memorabilia from Tifton’s only Medal of Honor recipient to Tift Hall.

“We will dedicate that space in October of this year,” Bridges said. “We are proud to have members of the Durham family with us today as we pause to consider what we have accomplished for veterans in the past year and what we hope to accomplish in the year to come.”

Durham gave his life serving his country in the Republic of Vietnam with the 1st Infantry Division on Oct. 17, 1967. He was honored posthumously with the Medal of Honor in a presentation to his mother, Grace Durham Jolley, on Oct. 30, 1969.

“We have accumulated a great deal of memorabilia from Pinky’s life,” Bridges said. “The real Medal of Honor will hang in a place of honor in Tift Hall when we’re finished. We will also honor other former ABAC students who served our country in this space.”

As a culmination to the ceremony, Bridges awarded the 2016 Durham scholarship to Erin Fowler, a senior at Tift County High School. He also announced that Kevin Joachin, the 2015 recipient, would receive the scholarship for another year. Joachin is now a rural studies writing and communications major at ABAC.

Bridges said the reception to honor the Durham scholarship winners will always take place at the annual Carry The Load Step-Off Rally at ABAC. Carry The Load aims to restore the true meaning of Memorial Day by connecting Americans to the sacrifices of our military, law enforcement, firefighters, and rescue personnel.

“I want to personally thank all the students, faculty, staff, and members of the community who came out and supported the Carry The Load effort,” Bridges said. “We had a great day, and our thoughts and prayers will be with the team members who have a long month ahead of them as they travel toward Dallas.”

ABAC has seven students and four nurses participating in the East Coast Carry The Load Relay which began in West Point, N.Y., on May 1 and ends in Dallas, Tex., on Memorial Day. Four other ABAC students are a part of the West Coast Relay which began in Seattle, Wash., on April 27 and also ends in Dallas on Memorial Day.