



FOCUS

ABRAHAM BALDWIN AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

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Former Navy SEAL to Speak at Commencement Thursday

Former United States Navy SEAL Coleman Ruiz will be the guest speaker at the spring commencement ceremony at ABAC on Thursday at 10 a.m. in Gressette Gym on the ABAC campus.

Ruiz is President of Immediate Response Technologies, LLC, and a former Naval Officer in the Naval Special Warfare community as a member of SEAL Team 6. He spent 13 years as a SEAL team member, completing six operational combat deployments to both Afghanistan and Iraq, acting in both troop and joint task force command.

The last tour of duty for Ruiz was a part of the Naval Special Warfare Development Group (NSWDG) in Virginia Beach. While at NSWDG he directed operations and sensitive military programs involving coordination across

the most senior levels of the U.S. government, including advisory positions for two U.S. Ambassadors.

Since completing active duty service, Ruiz has served on the board of the Carry The Load non-profit organization, as the Director of Operations for a team cohesion and leadership development company, and sits on the board of two non-profit organizations for veterans.

Ruiz also serves on an advisory board of the Philadelphia Eagles football organization and participates with a community of professionals and practitioners in an ongoing research project called Mission Critical Teams. The



community of professionals includes military special operations, the FBI, urban and Wildland firefighters, law enforcement, and emergency room doctors. A ticket is required to attend the commencement ceremony at ABAC. Those without a ticket may view the ceremony via a live feed in Howard Auditorium. A limited number of tickets are available to each graduate.

The ABAC commencement ceremony will include the ABAC Alumni Association presentation of the prestigious George P. Donaldson award to the top graduate who participates in the event. Approximately 303 students are expected to receive diplomas.

ABAC Faculty Member Releases Book on Flannery O'Connor

Dr. Jordan Cofer, associate professor of English in the School of Liberal Arts at ABAC, has released his first book, "The Gospel According to Flannery O'Connor."

Published through Bloomsbury Press, the book is currently available in hardback. Bloomsbury has published such works as the "Harry Potter" series, "The Fault with Our Stars," and "The Kite Runner." Cofer has studied O'Connor's work extensively for many years.

"The book is unique in that it is the first to argue that O'Connor's stories are actually based on biblical stories," Cofer said. "Many people realize that O'Connor was a strong Catholic, and



Cofer with his first book, "The Gospel According to Flannery O'Connor."

they write about how her work is influenced by her Christian faith, but my book uses primary and secondary sources to argue that it is influenced by the Bible itself. Overall, I think it's a book that combines theology with literary studies on Flannery O'Connor." Although he has published numerous articles and essays, Cofer's

first book has been an eight-year process. Now that it's complete, he can't believe it's really finished.

"It's certainly exciting – exciting to be finished," Cofer said. "I'm nervous about what I'm going to do next because I'd like to write another book at

some point, and it feels really strange to be finished with my first one. I'm also worried that no one will buy it or that critics will hate it, but that's also a little beyond my control."

Cofer credits the book as a key component in the fact that he has earned one of the very selective spots in the National Endowment for the Humanities Institute for a workshop on O'Connor titled "Reconsidering Flannery O'Connor."

"I'm pretty sure I wouldn't be receiving the NEH grant if it had not been for my book," Cofer said. "Of the 25 recipients who received the award, most of the other scholars work at large, prestigious schools such as Stanford, Duke, Harvard, and the University of Chicago, so it was great to see ABAC's name on the list."

Cofer will travel to Milledgeville in July with 24 other teachers selected to participate in the program. Each scholar will receive a stipend of \$3,300 to

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cover travel, study, and living expenses.

"This is a prestigious honor because there is a lot of competition to receive an NEH grant," Cofer said. "It's a really hard program to get into."

Cofer will participate in the four-week program that will be co-directed by Dr. Marshall Bruce Gentry of Georgia College and State University and Dr. Robert Donahoo of Sam Houston State University. The NEH grant selectees will attend 10 lectures, participate in seminars conducted by four leading O'Connor scholars, and spend a week

working with materials available to scholars only through the Georgia College library.

O'Connor attended the Peabody Laboratory School before enrolling at the Georgia State College for Women (GSCW), now Georgia College and State University, in an accelerated three-year program after the death of her father. She is considered one of America's greatest fiction writers and her book, "The Collected Stories of Flannery O'Connor," won the National Book Award for the Best National Book.

Cofer's book on O'Connor will be released in paperback sometime next year. For now, he says he's just trying

to enjoy some time off from writing and then he hopes to throw himself into another project.

Currently serving as the Director of the Writing Center, Cofer is the English Department representative for the faculty senate and co-chair of the Literature committee. Previously he served as an advisor for the Rural Studies Club and the Reading Club.

Cofer earned his B.A. in English from Southwest Baptist University, his M.A. in English from Virginia Tech and his Ph.D. in English from Texas Tech University. He has been an ABAC faculty member since 2009.

Don Coates Made ABAC Music for 40 Years

When Don Coates interviewed for a teaching job in the music program at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College in 1974, he had long hair, a beard, and a mustache. Academic Dean Frank Thomas told him that the Tifton community probably wasn't ready for that particular grooming style.

"I told him I would shave off the beard but I was keeping the mustache," Coates said with a smile last week when he announced that he was retiring from ABAC after 40 years as a part of the music program.

"I had no idea I would be at ABAC this long," Coates said. "My goal when I graduated from college was to find a place for a couple of years, get some experience, and move on. When I got the job at ABAC, I thought two years max. Now here I am 40 years later."

Honored by letters from the United States Congress, the Georgia Senate and the Georgia Music Educators at his final concert with the ABAC jazz band, Coates started almost from scratch and constructed a music program comparable to those at much larger institutions.

During his tenure, Coates served as the College Division Chair of the state board of the Georgia Music Educators Association, served as the State Advisor for the Student Music Educators National Conference, served as the College Chair for District 2 of the Georgia Music



Educators Association, and received a Pacesetter award from the ABAC newspaper. "There had been a music program here before I came," Coates said. "Dr. Pete (Donaldson) and Ernest Edwards were the two that really got the choir started. I added both the concert band and jazz band in 1974. We had never had a jazz band so that was unique. It really took off in the community."

Coates said his predecessor, Ted Williams, had "seven or eight students" in an ABAC concert band prior to his arrival and supplemented the group with students from Tift County High School. By knocking on every student's door in the ABAC dormitories, he filled up the band with ABAC students his first year on the job.

The Florida State University graduate initiated the ABAC Jazz Festival which recently completed its 36th year. Well known throughout the nation, the ABAC Jazz Ensemble has performed in St. Louis and Atlanta for the National Jazz Educators Network Conference. The Jazz Ensemble has also been on three European tours, performing at the North Sea Jazz Festival in Rotterdam in The Netherlands; the Montreux Jazz Festival in Montreux, Switzerland; and at the opening of the Tour de France in England.

"I had a hard time getting them to try the food over there," Coates said.

"They were used to this good, old Southern food. But when those kids came back to Tifton, I saw a remarkable difference in the way they looked at things. That's the main idea behind a trip like that, to give these kids a chance to see other cultures and grow a little bit."

Coates will never forget all the Tour de France bicycles whizzing by in London while the band played in an outdoor amphitheater.

"It was amazing," Coates said. "The London people love jazz. They got up and danced."

Coates talked with pride about introducing jazz to ABAC students and then seeing those same students get their education and develop jazz bands of their own. Eight ABAC alumni who took classes under Coates now direct their own high school jazz bands.

"There are so many great memories," Coates said. "The hair styles and the clothing have really changed in 40 years but the kids haven't really changed. They are still good kids who want to learn. They are very receptive to the music."

Playing the trumpet has always been a passion for Coates, and he plans to continue to blow his horn for a few special church-related events in the community.

"That's always been a love of mine," Coates said. "I enjoy playing at some of the Easter and Christmas services. I hope to still contribute and give some time to that."

But there's no doubt about his number one priority in retirement.

"My wife and I have four children and 10 grandchildren," Coates said. "That's our first priority. We're going to see the grandchildren."

ABAC Employees Receive Service Awards

Five retirees have been honored, and service awards have been presented to 30 other employees in recent days at ABAC.

Retirees include Dr. Rod Brown, Wanda Golden, Bobbie Baldree, Dr. Doug Waid, and Mike Williams. Brown, department head of forestry and wildlife for the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources, had 30 years of service. Golden, the former Dean of the School of Nursing and Health Sciences, had 15 years of service. Baldree, administrative associate in the Office of College Advancement, had 30 years of service. Waid, professor of forest resources in the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources, was a faculty member for 13 years. Williams was an ABAC staff member for 36 years, winding up his career as the Interim Chief Information Officer.

Dr. Kay Weeks, professor of communication and English in the School of Liberal Arts, was honored for 35 years of service to ABAC. A 30-year service award went to Shirley Wilson, administrative assistant in the Physical Education and Athletics Office in the School of Human Sciences.

Those recognized for 25 years of service were Cindy Barber, Janet Haugh-



Honorees from the service awards and retirement presentations at ABAC included (l-r): Dr. Kay Weeks, with 35 years of service; Bobbie Baldree, retiring with 30 years of service; Shirley Wilson, with a 30-year service plaque, and Mike Williams, retiring with 36 years of service.

ton, Dr. Mary Ellen Hicks, and Wayne Jones. Rebecca Arnold was recognized for 20 years of service to ABAC.

Dr. Renata Elad, Anthony Fitzgerald, Philip Hightower, Katrina McCrae, and Beverly Wesley were honored for 15 years of service. Those honored for 10 years of service to ABAC included Nancy Anthony, Emily Cheek, Shawn Cox,

Teri Mathis, Deborah Pyles, and Keisha Spears.

Those receiving awards for five years of service were Elaine Auger, Christina Dent, Dr. Kingsley Dunkley, Dr. Cynthia Hall, Nicholas Hardin, Robbie Hawsey, Joseph Johnson, Debbie McComas, John Layton, Mickie Tompkins, Amanda Urquhart, and Donna Webb.

ABAC Faculty and Students Attend 2014 Plains Chautauqua

Rosalyn Carter pledged support of caregivers as part of the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site Education Program and the 2014 Plains Chautauqua. Faculty from the School of Nursing and Health Sciences and the School of Liberal Arts, along with students from the nursing and rural studies program attended the event. The Plains Chautauqua event is one of a series of symposia that seeks to bring the arts, entertainment and lectures to rural communities across the country. At the opening event of the Chautauqua, Carter spoke on the latest evidence-based research on support for family members caring for their ill and elderly relatives. She also spoke on the efforts of the Carter Center and the Rosalyn Carter Institute for Caregiving in the areas of mental health advocacy. The ABAC group also toured the museum at the Plains High School and the Jimmy Carter Boyhood Farm. Pictured (l-r): faculty members Dr. Bobbie Robinson, Tammy Carter, Wendy Harrison and Dr. Troy Spicer. Students (l-r) Dean Devlin, Kailey Aldridge, Brittany Benton.



Business Plan Makes it to Final Round

ABAC Stafford School of Business students participated in the final round of the TiE Atlanta Business Plan Competition for University Students Across Georgia. Student representatives from eight Georgia institutions competed. Pictures (l-r): Lindsay Partridge, Elisabeth O'Quinn, JT Ramsey, and Gabby Hernandez.

Orientation Dates:

May 30

June 6

June 20

July 11

July 18

August 8

For more info visit

www.abac.edu/future-students/orientation

Four Fillies Softball Players Named All-Region

Four players from the ABAC softball team have been selected for the National Junior College Athletic Association All-Region XVII team.

Jenna Byrd from Macon and Rachel Hill from Snellville were named to the first team, and Brittany Davis from Lizella and Taylor Boyett from Fayetteville, Tenn., were picked for the second team. Byrd and Hill also made the all-tournament team along with ABAC's Maiah Talmage from Valdosta.

Coach Donna Campbell's Fillies wound up second in the NJCAA Region XVII tournament, falling to top-seeded Darton State by a 7-5 score in the championship game.

Ranked 13th in the nation, Darton has now won 19 consecutive games heading into the national tournament in St. George, Utah.

ABAC rolled up a 29-16 record this year including a 17-7 worksheet in the conference. Campbell, who won a national championship at ABAC in her first year as the head coach in 1996, expressed a great deal of pride in the effort of this year's squad.

"I am so proud of this team," Campbell said. "We had a great year."

Final Grade Entry Deadline Wednesday at Noon

The deadline for final grade entry is noon on Wednesday. Students will be notified by email when final grades are available to view. For every student receiving a grade of 'F', it is very important that you include the last date of attendance and the number of absences. This information is required by federal financial aid, and is also extremely important if the student appeals a financial aid or academic suspension. Instructions for grade entry are available on the Registrar's page underneath Faculty Resources. For any students in the class who have withdrawn, we will be rolling W's and WF's prior to grade entry today.

Remember that grades are due in Banner within 24 hours of giving the final exam.



Carter Named Distinguished Ambassador and President

Slayten Carter (right) from Willacochee received the prestigious Distinguished Ambassador award from Ambassadors President Lisa Stephens. The Ambassadors are a select group of 16 students who assist the public relations and admissions offices in a variety of tasks throughout the year. The Ambassadors vote on their Ambassador of the Year at the end of the spring term. Carter, a political science major, will also serve as president of the organization for the 2014-15 academic year.

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Like Carry The Load and The Stallion on

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WHO ARE YOU CARRYING?

ABAC Birthdays

10 Stephanie Coney

9 Patneelyn Smith

Happy Birthday

The FOCUS is an electronic publication produced by the ABAC Public Relations Office.

Please submit information by **Thursday at noon** to Ashley Mock at amock@abac.edu for inclusion in the next FOCUS.

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