



# FOCUS

## ABRAHAM BALDWIN AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

VOLUME LII

ISSUE 39

July 17, 2017

### Bridges Began 12<sup>th</sup> Year as President of ABAC on July 1

As of today, Dr. David Bridges will have accumulated over 4,000 days as the president of ABAC. Out of all those days, he readily points to Jan. 7, 2008 as his “best day ever.” Bachelor’s degree classes came to ABAC on that day to reshape the future of the college.

“The day we offered our first bachelor’s degree classes was my best day ever at ABAC,” Bridges said. “We have done a lot, renovating the front of campus, opening the Freedom Gallery, and a lot of other highlights. All those things were great but getting the bachelor’s degrees was transformational.”

Well over half of ABAC’s 3,475 students are now seeking bachelor’s degrees. That’s at a college that

offered only associate degrees for 75 years. Times have certainly changed. That’s true for Bridges as well. He became the 10<sup>th</sup> president in the history of ABAC on July 1, 2006. Now he has completed 11 years as president and is the longest serving president in the University System of Georgia.

“I can’t honestly tell you that being the longest serving president gets you anything,” Bridges said with a chuckle. “I have seen a lot in these 11 years. It’s a lot different that it was when I started. From a management standpoint, everybody regulates you and tells you how to do your job.

“That makes leading the

college difficult. I spend more time on management because of the complexity of the job.”

Not one of the presidents that Bridges sat across the table from in meetings in 2006 is still president at that college or university in the System today.

“Now ABAC is a four-year college, and we must figure out how to thrive. We must be unique. And ABAC is unique. We are not the same as everybody else. We don’t want to be.”

Bridges pointed toward a “mission of excellence” as the key to the success that ABAC has enjoyed in the last four years when it became the only college or university south of Macon to register an enrollment increase in three of those years.

**Continued on page 2**

### \$21.4 Million Project to Include Fine Arts Building, Carlton Renovation

A \$21.4 million project that will create a fine arts building and completely rehabilitate and repurpose the Carlton Library into a more comprehensive learning center is now on the drawing board at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College.

ABAC President David Bridges said the project is a top priority for the academic year ahead as the college prepares for the return of students for the fall semester on Aug. 16.

“We have needed a fine arts building on this campus for a long time,” Bridges, who began his 12th year as the ABAC President on July 1, said. “Our music program is second to none, and those students deserve a first-rate facility.

“The Carlton renovation will

allow us to take advantage of a large space which is presently under-utilized. Moving the campus store operation to Carlton opens all kinds of possibilities. Student engagement is the name of the game.”

Director of Capital Planning Melvin Merrill said the 24,000-square foot fine arts building will be on the front of the campus and will perfectly complement the Health Sciences Building located at the north end of ABAC Circle.

“The building will have practice space for a 100-plus member orchestra and space for an 80-plus member vocal group,” Merrill said. “There will also be individual practice rooms which are acoustically controlled.”

The building will also include a piano laboratory, offices, a classroom, and an area set aside for art students. Music students will have easy access to nearby Howard Auditorium, the concert venue for the choral program, the jazz band, and the concert band.

The rehabilitated 61,000-square foot Carlton Library will be the home for the library, financial aid, student media services, the registrar, counseling, the Veterans Center, the Academic Assistance Center, the student newspaper, the television studio, the campus radio station, and other offices.

Bridges said the legislature has approved \$1.6 million in design funds for the project. He hopes the remainder of the funding will be approved during the upcoming legislative session.

**Continued on page 2**

## Bridges from page 1

“That’s the funny thing about it,” Bridges said. “We didn’t focus on enrollment. We focused on excellence. The enrollment went up because of that.”

“We are a boutique, not a Walmart. Now there’s nothing wrong with Walmart. In fact, we have Walmart prices. But we have an L.L. Bean product.”

Bridges thrives on change and has no opinion on what his legacy at ABAC will be.

“My legacy will be for other people to decide,” Bridges said. “I think changing the physical face of the campus through the Front Campus Renovation, the Freedom Gallery, the Thrash Wellness Center, and the Foundation Legacy Pool make you proud to be a part of ABAC. Students appreciate it, faculty and staff appreciate it, and I think ABAC alumni appreciate it.”

If Georgia lawmakers continue to assist with funding, another new building will rise from the ground on the front campus of ABAC in years to come.

“Our focus for 2018 will be to build a fine arts building on the front of the campus,” Bridges said.

Bridges said his second goal for this year is to strengthen new bachelor’s degree programs in agriculture education, agricultural communications, and nursing.

“Adding ag ed to the curriculum last year will have a huge impact on enrollment in the future,” Bridges said. “It will also have a phenomenal impact on our legacy in agriculture. The more ag teachers we have out there from ABAC, the more students we will get back. I believe ag teachers have more influence on the students they teach than maybe any other teacher in high school.”

Consolidation with Bainbridge State College has never been far from Bridges’ mind since University System Chancellor Steve Wrigley announced on Jan. 6 that Bainbridge State will merge with ABAC.

“Things are constantly changing but as far as what we know now, we’ll submit a proposal to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) on September 1,” Bridges said. “SACS will vote on the proposal in December. If approved, the Board of Regents will

vote on it.

“If all that happens, ABAC would assume institutional responsibility for the Bainbridge campus on January 1, 2018. Southern Regional Technical College will take over all the technical classes. SACSCOC will send a team to the site later in 2018.”

“In terms of our identity culture and who we are, I don’t think we’ll be a lot different in 2027,” Bridges said. “We will be far more settled in our role as a baccalaureate institution. And I believe we will have a broader selection of bachelor’s degree programs.”

As for Bridges himself, he’s making no promises about his future.

“I don’t have a timetable for my retirement,” Bridges said with a broad smile. “I still have a few things I would like to do here. I don’t anticipate doing this type of job somewhere else. When I leave, it will be for something totally different.

“I hope I know it’s time to leave before everybody else knows it. I have never looked for my next job. Opportunities always seem to appear.”

## ABAC First Lady Hosts Trip to Lakeland

ABAC First Lady Kim Bridges along with Director of Advancement/Development Deidre Martin hosted a group of ladies on a tour of Lakeland last week. They’re Lakeland host was May Graduation speaker and Lakeland native Nell Roquemore. Throughout the day they toured the Milltown Murals, Threatte Center and the home of Georgia Governor E.D. Rivers.



## Fine Arts from page 1

“When we completed the front campus renovation in 2013, we knew there was one more piece to the puzzle,” Bridges said. “The fine arts building will fit perfectly as that missing piece. As far as the Carlton Library portion of the project, I believe that building will become the hub for student learning on this campus.”

Merrill said a design professional

will be selected for the project on Sept. 8. He hopes construction can begin during the fall of 2018 with an optimistic completion date of August, 2019.

“I would love for students to enjoy the completed project when classes begin for the fall semester of 2019 but that’s probably going to push us,” Merrill said. “Opening the buildings in January of 2020 is a more realistic scenario.”

The American Red Cross will host a **Blood Drive** at ABAC on Wednesday, July 19. The blood drive will take place in the Nickelodeon from 9:30 a.m. until 5 p.m. For more information, contact Shea Register at 229.449.2671 or [Dana.Register@redcross.org](mailto:Dana.Register@redcross.org)