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AUGUST 1, 2013

Dr. Tim Marshall explains how ABAC uses the J.G. Woodroof Farm as a learning laboratory. Fall term classes begin at ABAC on Aug. 14.

Cook County Resident Says Internships Vital Part of ABAC Curriculum

TIFTON—Student interns from Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College covered the country this summer from Maine to Montana getting a step ahead on careers ranging from beekeeping to blueberries.
Dr. Tim Marshall, Dean of the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources, can’t wait to hear of the many adventures the students will share when classes begin for the fall semester at ABAC on Aug. 14. Marshall makes a short commute to the ABAC campus each day from his home in Cook County.

“We want to make sure every student that graduates from our program is a valuable resource for the employer,” Marshall said. “Internships are a big part of that.”

During the 2012 fall term, ABAC attracted students from 25 countries, 22 states, and 151 of Georgia’s 159 counties. Some of those students returned to their home states for internships but others sought new venues to expand their knowledge on what may be a career for them one day.

“We had around 100 students interning from the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources all the way from Montana to South Texas to New England down to South Florida,” Marshall said. “They were working on everything from golf courses to citrus, from beekeeping to blueberries, and a lot of them were working in agribusinesses.

“At ABAC, we depend on experiential learning. We have learning outcomes for every class and every major. For a student to get a chance to work a summer in their particular field of study is very important.”

Marshall said some of the students later gain full time employment because of the positive impressions they made as interns. Getting along with people is vitally important.

“As much emphasis as we put on subject matter skill sets, I can tell you that the very first things that employers ask about are character traits like honesty, dependability, and work ethic,”
Marshall said. “They expect them to understand the industry. That’s part of their college education.

“What they want from us are quality people with a good work ethic. They just want to hire someone who is a good person.”

Marshall has the ability to look at ABAC from the inside out. He came to the college as a student in the fall of 1975. After a long academic career at the University of Florida, he returned to ABAC as an administrator and faculty member in 2006.

“It’s a dream come true for me,” Marshall said. “It’s perfect. If I had written a novel, I couldn’t have written a better final chapter to my working career. My job is simple. Get the road blocks out of the way so that the students, faculty, and staff in the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources can do what they are capable of doing.”

ABAC’s enrollment is expected to surpass 3,000 students this fall term. Around 1,000 of them will be enrolled in the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources. Marshall knows the ABAC learning laboratories including the 200-acre J.G. Woodroof Farm and the 95-acre Forest Lakes Golf Club are an important piece of the recruiting process.

“People don’t usually think of a farm as a learning laboratory but at ABAC, that’s exactly how we use the J.G. Woodroof Farm,” Marshall said. “It’s very important that our students are capable of doing what they are learning in their curriculum. We want to make sure they have the proficiency in a certain area that is required by employers who hire them. We use the farm in some of our classes to make that happen.”
ABAC students also make use of the Forest Lakes Golf Club, owned by the ABAC Foundation and operated by the college. The nine-hole public golf course was a gift to the Foundation from Dr. Larry Moorman and his wife, Debra, in 2002. In 2009, the Moormans donated the clubhouse as well.

“It is still a public golf course but it’s also a learning lab for our turfgrass and golf course management majors,” Marshall said. “We have one full time professional, our golf course superintendent Austin Lawton, out there who is also one of our graduates. Students learn to run a golf course before they ever leave ABAC.”

Marshall said the Forest Lakes course will again be the site for the annual ABAC Ag Classic on October 7. Proceeds from the tournament go toward student scholarships in the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

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