The ribbon-cutting for the grand re-opening of the historic front campus was an exciting moment at ABAC in 2013. Tift, Lewis and Herring Halls, the three original building built in 1906, were fully renovated and reopened at the March 1 celebration.

ABAC Enrollment Increase, Front Campus Opening Highlight 2013

TIFTON--One of the highest student enrollment increases of any college in the state and the grand re-opening of the historic front campus highlighted the 2013 calendar year at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College.
Fall semester classes included an enrollment of 3,394 students, a five per cent increase over the 2012 fall term. ABAC President David Bridges said every room was filled at ABAC Lakeside and ABAC Place. Almost 1,000 students were enrolled in bachelor’s degree programs, the highest number in the 105-year history of the college.

“We have known it for a while but I think students in the state and the nation are now recognizing ABAC as a bona fide baccalaureate-degree granting institution,” Bridges said.

Only 13 colleges and universities in the 31-unit University System of Georgia reported enrollment increases for the 2013 fall term. Only two, Southern Polytechnic and Atlanta Metropolitan, topped the size of the ABAC increase. Students came from 151 of Georgia’s 159 counties, 19 states, and 24 countries. The states included Maine and Washington, and the countries included Japan, Jamaica, Australia, and Morocco.

The bachelor’s degree in biology is the fastest growing single major at ABAC with 202 students enrolled in a program that began offering junior and senior level classes in the fall term of 2011. Six hundred of the 1,000-plus students in the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources are enrolled in bachelor’s degrees including 170 in Natural Resource Management. The number of Rural Studies majors has grown from 50 to almost 200.

Director of Public Relations Ashley Mock coordinated the Historic Front Campus Rededication Ceremony on March 1. The event included the opening of the George T. Smith Parlor, the History Room, and the Presidential Gallery in Tift Hall, as well as the re-opening of Lewis Hall and Herring Hall. Director of Capital Planning Melvin Merrill directed the mammoth, multi-year project for ABAC which also included a complete revamping of the front lawn, a bronze statue of the Stallion mascot, and a new sign in front of the college.

Fitzgerald sculptor Randy Anthony carved busts of Henry Harding Tift and Abraham
Baldwin out of 500-pound blocks of Georgia marble to complement the Tift Hall entranceway. As a part of the ceremony, three alumni, Cathy Cox (Class of ’78), A.J. Powell (Class of ’40), and Mamie Ethel Talley (Class of ’28) rang the original bell that summoned students to class in 1908.

Other events at ABAC during the 2013 calendar year included:

The ABAC Jazz Ensemble performed at the International Jazz Educators Network Conference in Atlanta.

Seven new trustees joined the ABAC Foundation. They included James Lee Adams, Jr., from Camilla; Greg Goggans from Douglas; James Holcombe from Savannah; Niki Knox from Peachtree City; John W. Langdale, III, from Valdosta; James H. Moore, III, from Albany; and Jim Sparks from Hendersonville, N.C.

Bridges received the John Hunt Entrepreneur of the Year Award at the annual Tifton/Tift County Chamber of Commerce Banquet. The Peach State Opera Company performed “Madame Butterfly” as a part of the “ABAC Presents” performing arts series.

“U.S. News & World Report” named ABAC one of the top public schools in the South Region of the United States in its annual “Best Colleges” ranking. ABAC was ranked 14th in the poll.

ABAC Foundation Chief Operating Office Jodie Snow and Honors Program Director Cynthia Hall presented Ashley Childs and Kira Carreira with $1,000 scholarships at the first ever Stallion Scholars Evening. The ABAC Chapter of the Cattlemen’s Association was named the Georgia Cattlemen’s Association Chapter of the Year.

Kristen Ray, a junior rural studies major from Waycross, was crowned Ms. ABAC in the 44th annual contest. ABAC Alumni Association award winners at the annual awards brunch
included C. L. Morehead, Jr., of Athens, Distinguished Alumnus; Sonya Dale Martin Aldridge of Pavo, Helen Brown Sasser Award; Catrina Kennedy Pollard from Waynesboro, Outstanding Young Alumnus; Elzie Argene Claxton of Perry, J. Lamar Branch Award; Ann Graham from Tifton, Outstanding Educator; Jeff Sinyard from Albany, Outstanding Business Leader; Patricia Barber from Tifton, Outstanding Health Care; Greg Crumley from Tifton, Master Farmer; and Jeff Gibbs from Tifton, Honorary Alumnus. The Grady and Mary Ann Medford Family from Eldorado received the Family Legacy Award.

Inductees for the 2013 class of the ABAC Athletics Hall of Fame included members of the 1999 national championship men’s tennis team; Henry Will Jones from the 1936-37 baseball, basketball, and football teams; women’s basketball coach Julie Conner; baseball player Z.B. Hamilton, and tennis player Derrick Racine.

Bridges accompanied members of the Student Government Association and the Political Science Club to Atlanta to meet with Governor Nathan Deal, Senator John Crosby, Senator Tyler Harper, Representative Penny Houston, Representative Jay Roberts, and Representative Sam Watson. Harper, Roberts, and Watson are ABAC alumni. Also attending from ABAC were Dr. Chris Kinsey, Dr. Hans Schmeisser, and Dr. Joseph Njoroge.

The Baldwin Players presented “The Glass Menagerie” in the spring, and “The Taming of the Shrew” in the fall. The ABAC Bass Fishing Team ranked 16th in the nation in the latest Cabella’s Association of Collegiate Anglers poll. ABAC’s competition includes over 100 NCAA Division I universities.

Logan Layne, a freshman rural studies major from Manning, S.C., won the Mr. ABAC competition. The ABAC golf team finished second in the state tournament. Freshman Robbie Johnson earned All-Tournament honors and participated in the national tournament in Lubbock,
Faculty member Jordan Cofer signed a contract with Bloomsburg Publishing for his book, “The Gospel According to Flannery O’Connor.” The “Pegasus” literary magazine celebrated its 40th year with a reading and reception at the annual George Scott Day Celebration of the Arts and a Ruby Celebration at the Georgia Museum of Agriculture and Historic Village. Former faculty advisors Andrea Savage and Herbert Shippey were featured in a tribute in the 40th edition by student editor Angelo Smith.

The 2013 faculty and staff campus newspaper Pacesetter recipients included Dill and Susan Driscoll, Donna Webb, Nicholas Urquhart, and Mary White. Efrain Ruiz received the Superior Pacesetter. Other student Pacesetters included Suzanne Black, Devin Gibbs, Sue Mastrario, Luis Mendez, Jacob Nyhuis, and Kristen Ray. Melissa Escobar was selected as the 2013-14 Student Government Association president.

Both ABAC tennis teams finished second in the state tournament. The Fillies ended a string of 19 consecutive state titles. The Stallions finished ninth out of 26 teams in the national tournament.

At the Honors Day ceremony, Dr. Mary Ellen Hicks received the W. Bruce and Rosalyn Ray Donaldson Award for Teaching Excellence. Ernest Kelly was honored with the Roy R. Jackson, Sr., Award for Staff Excellence. Dr. Tim Marshall received the E. Lanier Carson Leadership Award for College Administrators, and Lorie Felton received the W. Bruce and Rosalyn Ray Donaldson Excellence in Advising Award. Sarah A. Rooks, a junior biology major from Ashburn, was selected as the J.G. Woodroof Scholar.

Six retirees were honored, and service awards were presented to 46 other employees at a picnic outside Gressette Gym after the Honors Day Ceremony. Retirees included Patricia Barber,
Patsy Hembree, Dr. John Galyean, Bobby Mathis, Catherine Rogers, and Teresa Williams. Melvin Merrill and Mike Williams were each honored for 35 years of service to the college. A 30-year service award went to Bobbie Baldree.

ABAC faculty member Abul Sheikh was the first person to drive a vehicle on the new four-lane road which connects Highway 41 to Moore Highway in front of ABAC. ABAC President David Bridges and ABAC Foundation President Roger Dill worked extensively to get the road changed from two lanes to four lanes.

United States Congressman and Tifton native Austin Scott was the guest speaker at the spring commencement ceremony. Of the 217 graduates participating, a total of 48 students received bachelor’s degrees including the first ABAC bachelor’s degrees ever awarded in Natural Resource Management (Forestry), Natural Resource Management (Wildlife) and Biology.

Elisabeth O’Quinn, a rural studies – business and economic development major from Fitzgerald, received the prestigious George P. Donaldson award at the ceremony. O’Quinn became the first Summa Cum Laude graduate in the history of ABAC with a grade point average of 3.94 on a 4.0 scale.

The Stafford School of Business partnered with State Farm Insurance agents Chad Sumner (Class of ’89) and Brent Dixon to place students in the State Farm Intern Program. ABAC alumnus Thomas “Boo” Weekley (Class of ’93) won the Crowne Plaza Invitational at Colonial PGA tournament in Fort Worth, Texas. He received over $1.1 million for his third win on the PGA Tour.

Congressman Scott wore an ABAC baseball jersey and cap during the annual Congressional baseball game in Washington D.C. Dr. Johnny Evans assumed the position of
Dean of the School of Science and Mathematics.

Alan Kramer gave up his role as the men’s and women’s tennis coach to become the Assistant Dean of Students. He will continue his duties as the Athletics Director. Dale White took over as head tennis coach.

Nicholas Urquhart was named Director of Academic Support Services. O’Quinn (Class of ’13) became the first ever Business Apprentice for the Stafford School of Business. Dr. Amy Willis (Class of ’89) was named Interim Chief Data Officer and Registrar upon the resignation of Jimmy Harper.

Sodexo announced the consolidation of its dining and facilities operations at ABAC with Dan Miller as the new Director of ABAC Operations. Robert Morgan was named the head baseball coach at ABAC upon the resignation of Jeff Kilgore.

At the August Board of Regents meeting, ABAC was designated as Georgia’s official agricultural state college. The honor coincided with the fact that the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources enrolled over 1,000 students for the first time ever. Andy Dunn, a diversified agriculture major from Menlo, was the 1,001st student to enroll in the school.

Caroline Black (Class of ’09), the Education and Agritourism Coordinator at Jaemor Farms in Alto, was the guest speaker at the freshman convocation. Academic Achievement Center Coordinator Rebecca Cofer said the AAC received the International Tutor Training Program Certification from the College Reading and Learning Association.

Assistant Director of Advancement Lynda Fisher coordinated the first ever Scholarship Milk and Cookies (MAC) Day. Over 100 students attending ABAC on scholarships gathered to write personal letters of appreciation to individuals and companies who provided scholarship funding.
The total economic impact of ABAC on Tifton and the surrounding area during the 2012 fiscal year was $261,313,451, according to a study commissioned by the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia.

ABAC tennis player Josh Page won the men’s singles event at the ITA regional championship, earning an invitation to play in the Small College National Championship tournament. He finished fifth in the nation in that tournament. Dr. William Moore (Class of ’91) was named the Department Head of Forest Resources in the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Georgia Governor Nathan Deal and Georgia Commissioner of Agriculture Gary Black visited with students at the ABAC building at the 36th annual Sunbelt Agricultural Exposition. Tim Carpenter was named the Director of Housing Operations. Dr. Tim Marshall, Dean of the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources, announced that he was stepping down from his position on June 30, 2014 to move to Virginia and marry Dr. Allison Faber.

ABAC received the Regents Award of Excellence from the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia for the Historic Front Campus Project. George (Class of ’52) and Betty Turk established an ABAC endowment to fund enrichment opportunities for students in the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Dr. Rod Brown was honored as a Professor Emeritus of Forestry. Brown was a faculty member at ABAC from 1982 until his retirement in July, 2013. ABAC hosted the premier of the documentary, “deepsouth.” Lisa Biagiotti, who produced and directed the film, talked to several ABAC classes before the screening.

Amanda Biondino, goal keeper on the women’s soccer team, was selected All-Region First Team for the Georgia Collegiate Athletic Association. The family of Earl Bennett (Class of
’57) established a scholarship in his honor.

Laura Daniel Major from LaGrange became the first student in the history of ABAC to receive two bachelor’s degrees at the same commencement ceremony on Dec. 13. She completed degrees in diversified agriculture and rural studies. Major also received the Donaldson Award at the ceremony. Dr. Tim Marshall, Dean of the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources, was the featured speaker. A total of 197 students received degrees.

###