ABAC student Kristoff Cohran (right) from Thomasville helps to "Carry The Load" on his recent 2,000-mile journey.

**Thomasville Student Helps ‘Carry The Load’ from New York to Dallas**

**TIFTON**—The hail storm came suddenly. But Kristoff Cohran from Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College would not be deterred. It was his time to “Carry The Load.”
Cohran, a senior business major from Thomasville, was one of seven ABAC students selected to participate in the nationwide “Carry The Load” relay which is an effort designed to restore the true meaning to Memorial Day by connecting Americans to the sacrifices of the military, law enforcement, firefighters, and rescue personnel.

Dill Driscoll conceived the idea of a national relay for “Carry The Load” three years ago. He and his wife, Susan, are the deans of the Stafford School of Business at ABAC. Through the help of national sponsors, Driscoll and the other organizers developed a relay from West Point, N.Y., to Dallas, Texas. This year’s event kicked off on April 29 and reached Dallas on May 25. For 2,000 miles, participants carried the American flag and the “Carry The Load” flag 24 hours a day.

“This was far and away our best year,” Driscoll said. “These kids have given me renewed faith in America. All of these ABAC students who were a part of the Relay were in real life situations. This was the real world. We picked these kids and trained them. They were ready.”

Driscoll knows of which he speaks. He and his marketing company were in charge of the 1996 Olympic Torch Relay from Los Angeles to Atlanta. Susan Driscoll, a Coca-Cola marketing executive at the time, met Dill on that trip. The Driscolls have coordinated eight other Olympic Torch relays since 1996.

Driscoll predicts “Carry The Load” will be bigger and better in 2015. He believes the common theme of “who are you carrying?” resonates with the American public. Most Americans have relatives who have served their country either in the military or as first responders.

Besides Cohran, the ABAC contingent included Demarcus Bateman, a business major from Ashburn; Rodney Troupe, a business major from Moultrie; John Driscoll, a business major
from Osierfield; Jo Leigh Warren, a journalism major from Fitzgerald; Matthew Reid, a business major from Eatonton; and Matt Fryman, a business major from Kennesaw.

Dill Driscoll and Lyndsey Walters, the internship and placement coordinator from the Stafford School of Business at ABAC, also made the trek which really started for the ABAC group with a special six-hour walk-off ceremony on the ABAC campus on April 24. It ended when 5,000 people welcomed the “Carry The Load” team to Reverchon Park in Dallas.

For Cohran, the day he will never forget is when he walked into Yardley Borough, Penn.

“We were met by the whole town,” Cohran, one of the leg captains on the trip, said. “They had American flags, and people were coming out of their houses. It was completely unexpected. It made me really understand what Memorial Day is all about.”

And then there was the hail storm.

“We were walking through North Carolina,” Cohran said. “It came up out of nowhere. There were four of us, and we just kept walking.”

The group traveled 60 to 150 miles a day. All the leg captains walked a couple of two-hour shifts every day. At night, some of the leg captains and Dill Driscoll rode bicycles to cover more ground. All the males slept on the bus. Walters and Warren stayed mostly at La Quinta hotels, one of the national sponsors for “Carry the Load.”

Every ABAC student on the journey spent a lot of time listening to men, women, and children who lost loved ones who were involved in the military or as firemen, policemen, or first responders.
“This mom and her daughter talked to me in Tennessee,” Cohran said. “I’ll never forget what the daughter said. ‘Spend good times with your daddy when he’s home, because you don’t know when he might not come home.’”

Cohran walked every day from 10 a.m. until noon and from 2-4 p.m. He can’t recall ever getting tired. There was a reason for that.

“When you start walking and you see the people, you tend to forget how tired you are,” Cohran said. “That part never really bothered me. I was proud to do it.”

As a part of his ABAC education, Cohran is taking other trips this summer to Vietnam and to Nicaragua. Those journeys will have a hard time living up to his “Carry The Load” experience.

“The trip really did give me a true understanding of what Memorial Day is all about,” Cohran said. “I heard many stories from parents whose sons or daughters were killed in action. They were sad but they were also very proud of the country their loved ones were fighting for.”

For this 21-year-old ABAC student, Memorial Day will never be the same.

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