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New ABAC Dean Ready to Broker Ideas for Agriculture & Natural Resources

TIFTON- When Dr. Jerome Baker was growing up on a farm in northwest Iowa, he never dreamed that one day he would be swatting gnats in the heart of south Georgia. But the new Dean of the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College is ready for a new challenge, gnats and all.

“I want to help broker ideas from our faculty, staff, students, and many other stakeholders so that our ABAC graduates who enter the agriculture and natural resources professions are the best and brightest,” Baker said. “When you think of agriculture in Georgia, you think of the
acres and acres of crop land right here in our part of the state. I want to make a contribution to agriculture and the abundant natural resources, and hopefully I can do that through our students.”

ABAC enrolled over 1,000 students in the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources during the 2013 fall semester. When classes begin for the 2014 fall term on Aug. 13, Baker expects another huge turnout of students.

“It’s very exciting to me to know the School is growing,” Baker said. “In my conversations with the students during my interview, several of them were from other states and diverse backgrounds. I think we can build on that.”

Baker has other building plans in mind, many of them hinging on relationships that his predecessor, Dr. Tim Marshall, initiated.

“Tim built some very strong relationships with various organizations in Georgia such as FFA and 4-H,” Baker said. “I want to continue those relationships and establish even more of my own, whether it’s with forestry, wildlife, or any other group that we can reach to establish ties with ABAC.”

Enrollment in bachelor’s degree programs at ABAC has skyrocketed from 40 students in 2008 to over 1,000 students today. Many of them pursue bachelor’s degrees in Diversified Agriculture, Turfgrass and Golf Course Management, Forestry, or Wildlife, all available in the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Baker likes the way ABAC went about the process of implementing the bachelor’s degree programs when it became a baccalaureate-degree granting institution, after offering only associate degrees for 75 years as a two-year college.
“In a situation like this, there’s bound to be some growing pains,” Baker said. “But ABAC has been very selective with these degrees. I can see where they were implemented in a strategic way. Now we have a full lineup so that we can accommodate students whether they want an associate degree or a bachelor’s degree. I just want to make sure all our students get a great education.”

ABAC President David Bridges, a 1978 ABAC graduate, believes Baker fits the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources perfectly.

“Jerry not only brings many academic credentials to his new position of Dean, but he also brings a wealth of executive leadership experience,” Bridges said. “We anticipate continued growth and enhanced reputation of the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources under his leadership.”

Baker has been serving as the Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director of Sigma Xi: The Scientific Research Society, a very prestigious international honor society for scientists and engineers. Founded in 1886, Sigma Xi has more than 538,000 members in 524 chapters worldwide. Baker has also served as publisher of the Sigma Xi American Scientist Magazine, recognized by scientists and engineers as a premier publication of its type.

Baker actually knows Tifton quite well. From 1990-2003, he served as an Associate Professor and Research and Extension Location Leader for Animal and Dairy Science in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences at the Tifton Campus of the University of Georgia.

Prior to his position at Sigma Xi, Baker served as the Chief Executive Officer of the Federation of Animal Science Societies, which is an association management company for 13
professional societies and publishes nine scientific journals. His tenure at the Federation followed a period of time when he served as the Executive Director for the American Society of Animal Science.

Baker earned M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in Animal Breeding from Texas A&M University, and a B.S. in Biology and Chemistry from Morningside College. He is married to the former Kathy Walker of Ty Ty.

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