Syd Blackmarr (center) from Tifton receives the Governor's Award for Arts and Humanities from Governor Nathan Deal and his wife, Sandra.

Blackmarr Selected for Governor’s Award in Arts

TIFTON—Thirty-nine years after she founded the Arts Experiment Station at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College, Syd Blackmarr from Tifton is still proudly carrying the banner for the advancement of the arts in Georgia. And Governor Nathan Deal appreciates that fact.
Deal recently named Blackmarr as one of 13 recipients of the 2014 Governor’s Awards for the Arts and Humanities. The awards were presented in partnership with the Georgia Council for the Arts and the Georgia Humanities Council.

“Georgia’s arts and humanities sectors propel our state forward by improving quality of life for the citizens and businesses of our state,” Deal said. “The individuals and organizations honored here today are committed to growing and sustaining Georgia’s vibrant culture and history, and I am grateful for their significant contributions to our state.”

Deal said the award recipients represent a diverse group of individuals and organizations that have laid the groundwork for Georgia’s growing creative industry through innovative programs, community collaboration and long term financial commitment.

Other recipients included Leslie Gordon from Atlanta, Fred and Dinah Gretsch from Savannah, Paul Hudson from Clarkston, Carl Purdy from Atlanta, Douglas Scott from Atlanta, The Activities Council of Thomson, the Atlanta Ballet in Atlanta, Brenau University in Gainesville, the Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta, the Freedom Singers from Albany, Meridian Herald from Atlanta, and the Richard B. Russell Library of Political Research and Studies in Athens.

ABAC Arts Connection Director Wayne Jones said Blackmarr was hired in 1976 to found the Arts Experiment Station, whose purpose was to direct a year-long study funded by the National Endowment for the Arts to focus on the cultural assets and needs of South Georgia communities.

Blackmarr used that study as springboard to develop a unique rural arts partnership that created arts councils in the counties of Ben Hill, Colquitt, Irwin, Cook, Berrien, Tift, Turner, and
Worth. She linked them together as the South Georgia Arts Alliance, Georgia’s first and only rural arts consortium.

Enlisting the support of a legion of volunteers, Blackmarr built a multi-county Arts and Entertainment Series that reached 7,400 people annually from 29 communities. She also created South Georgia’s first Arts in Black festival and the first fine arts festival, the Love Affair in Tifton. Blackmarr also initiated the project that led to the La Fiesta Del Pueblo Hispanic Festival.

“Her absolute insistence on bringing the highest standards for cultural programming to the area has permanently raised an expectation for quality arts as a part of daily life,” Jones said. “In that regard, her work has transformed the cultural landscape of an entire region within our state.”

Blackmarr retired from ABAC in 1999 but has continued to support the arts through the Tifton Museum of Arts and Heritage and other venues.

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