Evening for ABAC Sells Out; Big Payoff for Student Scholarship Program

TIFTON – When Katie Deal takes the Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College stage on March 6 at the annual Evening for ABAC, she will be singing the songs of Patsy Cline. ABAC
Vice President for External Affairs and Advancement Paul Williams will be singing the praises of the donors and sponsors for the annual scholarship fundraising event.

“This is just one arrow in the quiver of the Office of College Advancement in terms of fundraising efforts, but it is probably our best known effort,” said Williams. “We need to seize every chance we have to draw attention to the continually rising cost of a college education, the challenge that students and parents have in obtaining the necessary funding, and therefore the enormous good accomplished by those who support ABAC financially.”

Williams said the event is a complete sellout for the first time since the ABAC Foundation changed to a new format in 2008. He expressed his thanks to all sponsors and patrons whose contributions will make a difference in the lives of ABAC students for years to come.

Evening for ABAC actually began as an event called Dollars for Scholars in 1972 when ABAC President Clyde Driggers was looking for a way to complete the funding for the Chapel of All Faiths. After those dollars were in hand, all funds generated since that time have gone to ABAC student scholarships.

Anita Bryant was the first performer in a 37-year Dollars for Scholars run which included top entertainers such as Debbie Reynolds, Ray Stevens, Barbara Mandrell, Marie Osmond, and Roy Clark. Trisha Yearwood attracted the largest crowd ever for the 2006 show, which was held at the University of Georgia Tifton Campus Conference Center.

Through outright gifts and matching funds, Williams said the event has raised millions of dollars for student scholarships. In 2014, the ABAC Foundation distributed $40,000 to 17 very
deserving Foundation Scholars. The goal for this year’s gala is to raise $55,000 in funds that will allow for 22 ABAC Foundation Scholarships for the 2015-2016 year.

ABAC Foundation Chief Operating Officer Jodie Snow said the Foundation Scholars program is very competitive and attracts some highly qualified students to the college.

“The Foundation Scholars are some of the top academic students from area high schools,” Snow said. “They have a lot of choices as far as colleges but the Foundation Scholars’ program offers them a tremendous incentive to choose ABAC.”

Williams said Evening for ABAC serves three primary purposes for the college. First, it allows the Office of College Advancement to raise funds exclusively for the ABAC Foundation scholarships; it provides an opportunity to celebrate the achievement of the recipients of the scholarships; and it offers an opportunity to invite benefactors and other supporters to celebrate another year of progress in the life of ABAC.

“Evening for ABAC also impacts future students of the college,” Williams said. “The funds raised from Evening for ABAC indirectly benefit all ABAC students who may need financial assistance attending college because the awarding of the ABAC Foundation Scholarships means that these recipients are not using less restrictive funds.

“Attracting these top academic students to the campus also improves the academic reputation of the college, adding value to an ABAC degree for all graduates – past, present, and future.”
As evidenced by this year’s sellout, Williams believes Evening for ABAC has the potential to grow well beyond its current size and have a much more significant financial impact as it likely outgrows the existing campus facilities.

“The bottom line is that the mission of the Office of College Advancement and the Evening for ABAC event may seem to be about raising money, but that is just a means to the real objective which is changing lives by allowing deserving students access to a quality education that they might not get otherwise,” Williams said.

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