Graydon’s Education Mission Started at ABAC in 1968

TIFTON—When Wasdon Graydon, Jr., attended his first day of college classes as a student at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College during the fall quarter of 1968, he never dreamed that one day he would put together a 37-year career at the institution and serve as the commencement speaker in the final event of ABAC’s 100th birthday celebration.
But he did because he was a man on a mission.

“My mission was to come to ABAC, get my education and move on,” Graydon, now 64, said in a recent interview. “I chose to stay in Tifton and go to ABAC because it was cost effective. I was the oldest of five siblings. I wanted them to have the chance to go to college as well.”

Black History Month activities abound at ABAC this month just as they do every year during February. Graydon helped to make some of that history. Unlike today, Graydon didn’t see a single African-American instructor when he went to freshman year classes in 1968.

“I think there were eight of us that year,” Graydon said. “We had good days and bad days. You have to consider the culture of ABAC at the time. It was nothing new to me because I had just gone through two years at Tift County High School.”

Graydon, son of the late Wasdon Graydon, Sr., and Lenora “Doll” Graydon, entered TCHS as a junior in 1966. He graduated in 1968 and turned his attention toward getting a college education. He received his diploma from ABAC in 1970.

“ABAC gave me a good foundation,” Graydon said. “I got a real good base. When I transferred to Georgia Southern and enrolled in honors’ history classes, I was fundamentally sound.”

Dr. Gary Roberts, an ABAC history professor, influenced Graydon’s decision to attend the college in Statesboro after he completed his ABAC curriculum.

“It was a good choice for me because Southern had a very good history department,” Graydon said. “Dr. Roberts had gone to Southern, and he was one of my mentors at ABAC.
“It was a similar situation at Southern. They did not have a lot of black students, but again, my whole mission was to get an education. I had to be successful and not fail. I did not want my siblings to say ‘Wasdon didn’t finish college.’ ”

Graydon started graduate school at Georgia Southern but then transferred to Valdosta State, where he completed his master’s degree in 1973. Then unlike most college graduates, he didn’t start looking for a job. It seems that jobs started looking for him.

“I had been working part time at Sears in Valdosta, and I was really considering going into their management program,” Graydon said. “I got a call from Dr. Tom Milam and Dr. Homer Day about interviewing for a job at ABAC.

“I could see myself at Sears, see bonuses, and see moving up. However, the people that interviewed me at ABAC showed me I needed to come back.”

On Sept. 1, 1973, Graydon did come back to ABAC as the Director of Student Support Services, fulfilling a tongue-in-cheek vow that he had made to ABAC President Clyde Driggers when Graydon received his diploma in 1970.

“I told Dr. Driggers on graduation day he would be hiring me in three years,” Graydon said with a smile. “I came back because I wanted to help students have a proper higher education experience at ABAC.

“During my early years, I reported to Dr. William Wheeler, and he provided a supportive environment for me to learn and utilize my talents. I was afforded the opportunity to put some things in place and move the institution in the direction it wanted to move. Some of it was easy, and some of it was hard.”
One of the brightest moments of Graydon’s career came on Dec. 12, 2008, when ABAC President David Bridges asked him to be the fall commencement speaker in the closing moment of ABAC’s 100th birthday celebration.

“That was another one of those humbling experiences that showed how hard work and going about it the right way can lead you to that graduation speaker’s podium,” Graydon said. “Never in my wildest imagination did I think I would be given such an opportunity.”

Many job possibilities came Graydon’s way before he retired from ABAC in 2010. He turned them all down because he decided Tifton was going to be home for his family, which includes his wife, Veronica, their daughter Jasmaine, and for his son Tremayne, daughter-in-law Recharda, and grandchildren Amora and Nelina when they visited.

Because of that decision to make Tifton his home, Graydon became involved not only in the future of ABAC but the future of Tift County. He was elected for two terms as a County Commissioner. Today, he serves on the board of directors of First Community Bank and Tift Regional Medical Center. Additionally, he has always been active in Everette Temple Christian Methodist Episcopal Church.

After his ABAC retirement, Graydon worked part time for Diversified Enterprises for four years. He is still a managing member of Graydon Enterprises, LLC.

“I have been blessed and humbled to have the opportunity to build a career in my hometown,” Graydon said. “Not many people get to do that; therefore, I feel very fortunate to be a part of this community.”

###