
ABAC President Announces Museum Plan for Tifton Medal of Honor Recipient

TIFTON – Memorabilia from the life of the only Medal of Honor recipient in the history of Tifton will be housed on the campus of Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College, according to an announcement Thursday afternoon from ABAC President David Bridges.
Bridges and his wife, Kim, hosted a reception honoring the memory of Medal of Honor recipient Harold Bascom “Pinky” Durham, Jr., who gave his life serving his country in the Republic of Vietnam with the 1st Infantry Division on Oct. 17, 1967. He was honored posthumously with the Medal of Honor in a presentation to his mother, Grace Durham Jolley, on Oct. 30, 1969.

Durham was an ABAC alumnum and a Tifton resident. Durham’s brother, John, and his sister, Genie, were at the reception in The History Room of Tift Hall for the announcement. It was a part of the annual ABAC Carry The Load Step-Off event, which attempts to restore the true meaning of Memorial Day.

“I am very pleased to announce that ABAC will be working with the Durham family to bring a collection of Pinky Durham memorabilia, including the Medal of Honor, back to Tifton,” Bridges said. “Soon ABAC will become home to the Pinky Durham Museum. It will provide people from this community and across the world an opportunity to learn about this great American.

“I would be remiss to not recognize my wife, Kim, for her tireless work with the Durham family to make this possible. It will be a huge win for the community, the Durham family, ABAC, and veterans everywhere.”

Bridges also said that ABAC, already acknowledged as a military-friendly campus, will create a Veterans Center, where students who are veterans “can gather, study, work together and access the support and assistance they have earned and deserve.”

In a final show of support for veterans, Bridges said he and his wife would commit to the funding of the $20,000 first phase of the new ABAC Veterans Enrichment Fund. He challenged
members of the ABAC Foundation Board of Trustees and members of the community to grow the fund to $100,000 by May 1.

President and Mrs. Bridges also presented a $1,000 ABAC scholarship to Tift County High School senior Kevin Joachin to close the ceremony. Joachin read his award-winning essay on Tifton’s Medal of Honor recipient before the presentation.

The front campus of ABAC was bathed in a sea of red, white, and blue on a perfect blue sky afternoon on Thursday as the Stafford School of Business at ABAC hosted the second annual Carry The Load Step-Off event.

Dill Driscoll, Dean of the Stafford School of Business, said the ABAC event served as a prelude to the National Carry The Load Relay which begins in West Point, N.Y., on April 28 and ends in Dallas, Texas, on Memorial Day.

Driscoll said the goal of Carry The Load is to restore the true meaning of Memorial Day by connecting Americans to the sacrifices of the military, law enforcement, firefighters, and rescue personnel. Carry The Load was established in 2011 by former Navy SEALs Clint Bruce and Stephen Holley.

The Step-Off began at noon with a two-mile route through the campus dedicated to the memory of Captain Raymond Merritt of the Tift County Sheriff’s Office. Leading the way were Raymond Merritt, Jr.; Cody Whiddon, student leader for the ABAC event; Sgt. Debbie Pyles from the ABAC Police Department; representatives from the Tift County Sheriff’s Office; and members of the ABAC Regional Police Academy. The rally culminated with a send-off of the National Carry The Load Relay participants in a ceremony in front of Lewis Hall. John Durham was one of the speakers at that ceremony.
ABAC students participating in the National Relay this year are Victoria Burnette, a business and economic development major from Cordele; Jessica Gorseth, a criminal justice major from Ball Ground; Aaron Harrell, a business and economic development major from Arlington; Lane Riley, a business and economic development major from Adel; Rilea Stapf, a business and economic development major from Jackson; and Spencer Wilbanks, a business and economic development major from Calhoun.

Matt Reid, an ABAC business and economic development major from Eatonton, will serve as the director of media for the second consecutive year. Demarcus Bateman, a business and economic development major from Ashburn, and Rodney Troupe, a business and economic development major from Moultrie, will also return for their second year on the trip. John Driscoll, a former ABAC student who participated in the national campaign last year, will also join the team from ABAC. Dill Driscoll will also be a part of the 2,000-mile journey.

ABAC Carry the Load event sponsors included Tiftarea Academy, the Short and Paulk Supply Company, the Georgia Peanut Commission, and the Tiftarea YMCA. For more information on Carry The Load, interested persons can visit carrytheload.org.

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