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President David Bridges addressed the faculty and staff of ABAC on Thursday in his annual state of the college address.

ABAC Fall Term Classes Begin August 12

TIFTON—Beginning Wednesday, a new small town sets up shop inside Tift County. That’s the day when over 3,300 students begin fall semester classes at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College.
“There’s always a lot of excitement centered on the first day of classes,” ABAC President David Bridges said. “I can imagine that all the local merchants are quite excited to have the students back on campus.”

ABAC administrators, faculty, staff, and returning students planned to spend much of Saturday helping the new students move into their living quarters at ABAC Place and ABAC Lakeside. It is always a time for lots of laughter and a few tears as parents headed back home.

The latest figures from the University System of Georgia indicate that ABAC has an economic impact of $281,563,172 on Tift and surrounding counties. One huge reason for that impact is that 1,300 students actually live on the campus. That instant population is larger than many small towns in Georgia.

The best news for local businesses is that many of those students are now staying in Tifton longer than ever before because ABAC is a baccalaureate degree granting institution after a 75-year period of graduates receiving only associate degrees.

“I think more of our students have a start-to-finish mentality,” Bridges said. “We have more committed students, and we certainly have more graduates. Our graduation rate is 200 per cent of the state college average.”

Over 1,100 ABAC students now major in four-year degree programs ranging from biology to business to wildlife. Those students take at least four years to finish their bachelor’s degrees. That means ABAC students stay in the area twice as long to consume food, buy fuel, purchase clothing, rent apartments, and add dollars to the cash registers of area businesses.

Bridges, who begins his 10th fall term as president, sees an even longer term impact.
“After staying in Tifton for four or more years, you know some of these graduates are going to make friends here, find jobs here, and raise their families here,” Bridges said. “They will get involved in churches, the school system, and community events. The intangible benefits are incredible.”

In his annual address to the ABAC faculty and staff on Thursday, Bridges encouraged every ABAC employee to engage students and the community in the upcoming year.

“Our goal is to be a destination for students who want to come here because it’s the best place to kick-start the rest of their life,” Bridges said. “We’re life developers. We prepare people for life. Every one of you has the potential to change the life of a student at ABAC.

“Graduation is the ultimate prize. When our students walk across that stage at graduation this December and next May, we should celebrate every one of them. That’s the ultimate sign of success for us. You can make a difference in their lives one student at a time.”

Bridges reflected on how much ABAC has changed since he became the 10th president in the history of the college on July 1, 2006.

“We were a two-year college then,” Bridges said. “Now we are a four-year college. We had 853 students living on campus. Now we have 1,300 living on campus. We had no Greek life. Now we have fraternities and sororities. We had about $200,000 in private support for students. Now we have over $500,000 in private support for students.”

Bridges said ABAC’s future will be much different than its past.

“ABAC must create for itself a future that embraces its identity, builds on its legacy, ensures greatness, and focuses its resources and effort to maximize impact,” Bridges said. “We
must become financially self-reliant and be nimble so we can respond to the ever changing needs of those we serve.”

Freshman students at ABAC are in the midst of the annual Welcome Week activities. Gloria Beard (Class of ’87), a longtime teacher at Tift County High School and a member of the ABAC Alumni Association Board of Directors, will address the freshmen in the annual fall convocation ceremony at 11 a.m. on Tuesday in Gressette Gymnasium.

The fall semester runs through Dec. 2. The fall commencement ceremony is set for 10 a.m. on Dec. 10.

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