ABAC Opens Veteran Success Center on Campus

TIFTON—Faculty, staff, students and administrators from Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College honored one of their own Friday during the opening of the new Veteran Success Center in J. Lamar Branch Hall.

ABAC alumnus Harold Bascom “Pinky” Durham, Jr., was awarded the Purple Heart and Medal of Honor posthumously for his bravery on Oct. 17, 1967 during the Vietnam conflict when he gave his life for his country. In an announcement on April 23, ABAC President David Bridges said ABAC will develop an area on campus to showcase memorabilia from Durham, Tifton’s only Medal of Honor winner, as well as creating a Veteran Success Center.

“By opening this Veteran Success Center, we hope to honor the memory of courageous soldiers like Pinky Durham and to help students who have been in the military transition to college and civilian life,” Bridges said. “Members of our armed forces make a tremendous sacrifice to represent this country. We can never thank them enough for what they do.”

Bridges said the mission of the Veteran Success Center is to provide services and support to the veterans, military family members, and those currently in service to our country’s armed forces in educational pursuits during the transition from military service through college to
becoming vital community members. This is done through veteran-to-veteran, individual service branch, and community connections.

As a part of the ceremony, ABAC became a Purple Heart College of the United States of America with a Purple Heart Proclamation.

The Purple Heart is the oldest decoration in present use and was initially created as a Badge of Military Merit by George Washington in 1782. It was the first American service award or decoration made available to the common soldier and is specifically awarded to any member of the United States Armed Services wounded or killed in combat with a declared enemy of the United States.

Other speakers at the event included Dr. David Snow, Director of Military Affairs at the University System of Georgia; ABAC student Matthew Bridges, a retired corporal from the U.S. Marine Corps; and Amanda Flener, Region IV President from the Military Order of the Purple Heart Ladies Auxiliary. Also assisting were Joseph Weatherford, retired staff sergeant from the U.S. Army; Luke Rabun, senior airman in the U.S. Air Force, and Spencer Wilbanks, specialist in the U.S. Army National Guard. Weatherford is an ABAC police officer, and Rabun and Wilbanks are ABAC students.

“The Center will serve not only as a place where students can study, read, write, and congregate; but also a place where they can relax, find camaraderie, support, and access to resources and information to further support their academic endeavors,” Snow said. “This Center serves as a visible testament of ABAC’s dedication to its military students, veterans, and their families.”

Matthew Bridges thanked ABAC for making veterans a priority.
“In the military there is a saying ‘leave no man behind’ and with your continued help we can help the students who are veterans now and in the future,” he said. “I know I owe my own success both personally and academically to the staff here at ABAC, and that is greatly appreciated.”

Those persons who wish to contribute to the Veteran Success Center can do so by making checks payable to the ABAC Foundation and sending them to the ABAC Foundation, 2802 Moore Hwy., ABAC 13, Tifton, Ga., 31793. All gifts to the ABAC Veteran Success Center fund are tax deductible. For more information, interested persons can contact Director of Advancement Deidre Martin at 229.391.4907 or via e-mail at dmartin@abac.edu.

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