Ellington to Address Constitution Day Event at ABAC September 17

TIFTON—Georgia Court of Appeals Judge John Ellington will be the guest speaker at the Constitution Day event at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College on Sept. 17 at 1:30 p.m. in the Chapel of All Faiths.
Ellington was sworn in as the 66th Judge of the Georgia Court of Appeals by Governor Roy Barnes on July 12, 1999. He was elected statewide to a full six-year term in 2000 and re-elected in 2006 and 2012.

Constitution Day will celebrate the signing of the United States Constitution by 39 men on Sept. 17, 1787 in Philadelphia’s Independence Hall. Abraham Baldwin, the namesake for Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College, and William Few were the only Georgia signers of the document.

The event is hosted by the ABAC Student Government Association (SGA) and the Department of History and Political Science in the School of Liberal Arts. The Constitution Day ceremony will begin with a welcome from ABAC President David Bridges followed by a performance of “The Star-Spangled Banner” from the ABAC Chamber Singers.

Student Government Association President Taylor Martin, a diversified agriculture major from Wrightsville, will introduce Ellington, who graduated from ABAC with degrees in business and political science. As a student he served as SGA president and received the George P. Donaldson Award as the outstanding graduate at the 1980 spring commencement ceremony.

Ellington will address the audience, answer questions, and announce the winner of the Constitution Day Essay Contest, which is sponsored by the SGA and the Department of History and Political Science.

After completing his ABAC education, Ellington attended the University of Georgia, graduating with a BBA degree in accounting in 1982. He received his Juris Doctor degree from the University of Georgia Law School in 1985. He was admitted to the Georgia Bar the same year.
Ellington became one of the youngest trial court judges in Georgia in 1991 when he was appointed State Court Judge of Treutlen County. He was re-elected to that post in 1992 and 1996. He has additionally served as a Superior Court Judge by designation in five circuits – 29 counties – throughout South Georgia and as a Municipal Court Judge. In 2001, 2006, and again in 2007, Ellington was awarded the prestigious Distinguished Judicial Service Award by the Younger Lawyers Division of the State Bar which recognized his outstanding service and commitment to improving the practice of law.

Ellington was named the Outstanding Young Alumnus by the ABAC Alumni Association in 1994. He is a member of the President’s Club at ABAC and serves as a trustee on the ABAC Foundation. A member of the First Baptist Church in Soperton, where he has taught Sunday School and served as chair of the Board of Deacons, Ellington and his wife, Sandra Kate, live on a family farm in Treutlen County.

Ellington’s remarks will touch on the significance of the United States Constitution, which was the culmination of the efforts of 55 men who attended the four-month long Constitutional Convention and produced the 4,543-word document, the oldest and shortest national constitution. Georgia representatives William Houston and William Pierce had already departed when the document was signed, leaving Baldwin and Few to make their mark on history.

ABAC President David Bridges said Baldwin was a key figure on the national level as well as in the history of Georgia.

“We are proud that our college is named for an individual who set the stage for higher education in Georgia and then helped to shape a document on the national level that has now
lasted 228 years,” Bridges said. “One of our historical exhibits in Tift Hall honors Abraham Baldwin and his many accomplishments.”

The Baldwin exhibit is one of several historical panels on the lower floor of Tift Hall. Other panels focus on Tifton founder Henry Harding Tift, ABAC alumnus George T. Smith, and the history of the college from 1908 to present day. All the exhibits are open to the public. Tours can be arranged by calling (229) 391-5055.

Baldwin was born on Nov. 22, 1754 as the son of a Connecticut blacksmith. He enrolled at Yale University at the age of 14 and completed his degree four years later. He served on George Washington’s staff as a chaplain during the Revolutionary War before beginning a study of law. After being admitted to the bar, he moved to Georgia in 1783 to set up a law practice near Augusta. One year later, Baldwin was elected to the Georgia House of Assembly and in 1787 he represented Georgia as a member of the Constitutional Convention.

Responding to a request by Georgia Governor Lyman Hall, Baldwin was the architect for an educational plan for both secondary and higher education in Georgia. Because of his leadership in this area, the state approved a charter for the University of Georgia in 1785. Baldwin served as the first president of UGA from 1785 until 1801, prior to the time students actually attended the institution.

Baldwin never had a wife or children but had strong convictions about the importance of a quality education for the youth of Georgia. He believed Georgia should “place the youth under the forming hand of Society, that by instruction they may be moulded to the love of Virtue and good Order.”
Beginning in 1789, Baldwin served Georgia for five consecutive terms as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives. He was then elected for two terms in the U.S. Senate, one of those as president pro-tem. Baldwin passed away on March 4, 1807 while serving in the Senate. Baldwin County is named for him.

On July 1, 1933, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia opened the institution known as Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College in his honor.

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