Three New Trustees Join ABAC Foundation

TIFTON—Three new faces will join the ranks of the trustees of the Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College Foundation, Inc., effective Jan. 1, according to an announcement today from ABAC Foundation Chair Lynn Lovett. She also said that another trustee has agreed to a new four-year term on the board.
“We are always looking for trustees who have the time and energy to devote to furthering the goals of the ABAC Foundation,” Lovett said. “All of our trustees are committed to the advancement of ABAC with a variety of different publics they represent.”

The new trustees included Emily Watson from Moultrie, Dr. Beverly Sparks from Athens, and Michelle Higdon from Clemson, S.C. John W. Langdale, III, from Valdosta has committed to a new term on the board.

Watson serves as Marketing Director for Colquitt Regional Medical Center. Prior to joining the administration of Colquitt Regional in 2014, she was the Archway Public Health Professional for Colquitt County for seven years. Watson has also served on the staff of Congressman Jack Kingston, first as a legislative aide in Washington, D.C. and later as a field representative/ag liaison in his Valdosta office.

A 2003 graduate of the University of Georgia (UGA) College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences where she majored in Agribusiness, Watson is married to Rep. Sam Watson, and they have two daughters, Lily and Lucy. The Watsons reside in Colquitt County where they are involved in the production of vegetables, cattle and hay.

Sparks recently retired as the Associate Dean for the UGA Cooperative Extension Service. She is a 1976 ABAC graduate, earning her associate degree in agricultural science. She received a bachelor’s degree in horticulture and a master’s degree in entomology from UGA. She earned her Ph.D. in entomology from Louisiana State University.

An extension urban entomologist at Texas A&M University from 1983-89, Sparks was the first female extension agricultural specialist for the university’s agricultural extension
service. She was also the first female president of the Southeastern Branch of the Entomological Society of America and the first female Associate Dean for Extension at UGA.

At UGA, Sparks served as an Extension Entomologist from 1989-95 before becoming Extension Program Coordinator for Entomology from 1996-2002. From 2002-2006, she was District Extension Director for the North and Northeast districts. She was Assistant Dean and Interim Associate Dean for Cooperative Extension from 2006-2007 and Associate Dean for Cooperative Extension from 2007 until her retirement.

In 1994, Sparks was recognized as the Outstanding Young Professional by the Georgia Association of County Agricultural Agents. In 1998 she was awarded the Walter B. Hill Award for Public Service at UGA. Named a Walter B. Hill Fellow in 1999, Sparks was recognized for Outstanding Service to the Georgia Pest Control Industry in 2002. She also received the Georgia Power Woman of the Year award in 2006 and was the recipient of the UGA College of Agriculture Service Medallion in 2014.

Sparks was the recipient of the ABAC Distinguished Alumnus Award on April 10 and was the guest speaker at the ABAC spring commencement on May 7. She has five other family members who have graduated from ABAC. Her husband, Allen Tibbetts, is also a 1976 ABAC alumnus.

Higdon is the former Chief Executive Officer and currently an advisor for Solid Gold Pet, a premium pet food provider. As CEO, she led the turnaround of a 40-year-old brand by developing a professional management team to lead growth, develop a more contemporary brand strategy, update packaging, and achieve distribution expansion within the pet specialty retail channel.
Higdon is also the former President/Chief Operating Officer for Waggin’ Train LLC, now a wholly owned operating subsidiary of Nestlé, and has 15 years of experience in the management of sales, marketing and operations in consumer packaged goods.

At Waggin’ Train, Higdon was responsible for all operations in the U.S. and abroad including global procurement, distribution, inventory control, supply chain, and finance. She was directly active with several national accounts such as Wal-Mart, Dollar General, and Sam’s Club.

Prior to her leadership at Waggin’ Train, Higdon was President of Ultra Pet, LLC, a pet products company which marketed premium cat litter, Litter Pearls, Ultra Pearls, and Cedar Fresh, as well as dog treats. Before joining Ultra Pet, she held the position of Vice President of Marketing and then Managing Director of Greased Lightning Household brands.

A 1986 graduate of ABAC, Higdon and her husband, Dr. Lee Higdon, Ph.D., have two children, Guy, who attended ABAC before transferring to Clemson University in 2013, and Gail, currently a student at Furman University. Michelle Higdon received her bachelor’s degree in Food and Resource Economics from the University of Florida. The Higdons live in Clemson, S.C. They have funded an endowment for the School of Agriculture & Natural Resources at ABAC.

Langdale is the president of The Langdale Company in Valdosta. He represents the fourth generation of family leadership for the company, which was founded in 1894. The Langdale Company is a highly diversified enterprise that includes forestry, forest products and other affiliate companies that span the automotive, banking, hospitality and land development industries.
In the company's first half century, it created economic opportunities for the communities in which it operated through the naval stores business. Since then, the company has moved aggressively into manufacturing and other areas.

The company’s evolution has followed an unceasing quest to make the most of limited natural and human resources via innovation. Every year since the 1930s, the company has planted more trees than it has harvested, and it is now approaching the planting of its hundred millionth seedling. That progressive environmental stewardship provides wildlife habitat, clean air and water.

Langdale attended ABAC and UGA, where he received his B.A. in Speech Communications. He serves as Chairman of the Board of the Georgia Forestry Commission. He is also a board member of the Georgia Forestry Association and the Georgia Conservancy. Langdale also serves as a Steering Committee Member for the Greater Okefenokee Association of Landowners.

Langdale and his wife, Kimberly, have two children, Caroline and John.

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