Tifton Residents Receive Top Awards from Georgia Association for Museums and Galleries

TIFFON – Polly Huff and Keith Rucker, both from Tifton, captured two of the top statewide awards for the Georgia Museum of Agriculture and Historic Village at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College during the recent annual meeting of the Georgia Association for Museums and Galleries (GAMG) in Albany.
Huff, the curator and assistant director of the Museum, received the Best Museum Special Project award for the Backroads of Georgia Photo and Literary Competition and Exhibit, and Rucker was selected as the Museum Volunteer of the Year in the state for his tireless efforts in multiple Museum tasks including service as the engineer for the 1917 steam locomotive.

Backroads of Georgia, a recurring event created by Huff and Dr. Sandra Giles, ABAC Professor of English, is a partnership between the Museum, the ABAC School of Liberal Arts, the Wiregrass Farmers Market, and Georgia BackRoads Magazine. In 2014, the first competition attracted over 200 photographs and approximately 100 essays, which were juried and displayed as a part of the three-month long exhibit. The top seven winners of both areas of the competition received cash awards and publication consideration by Georgia BackRoads Magazine. A 2017 edition of the Backroads of Georgia competition will begin accepting entries this summer.

During the conference, which included 120 museum professionals from across the state, Huff was elected to a two-year term on the GAMG Board of Directors and was also appointed to serve as a part of a special group of statewide museum professionals who hope to instigate legislation regarding museums which operate under the umbrella of colleges and universities. Huff’s work in the museum field earned a nomination for Top Museum Professional, Top Gallery Institution, and Top Museum Exhibit for the permanent installation of Dr. Coy Poitevint’s Veterinary Infirmary. The Museum earned six overall awards nominations.

Rucker, a 1991 ABAC alumnus, and Museum Volunteer Coordinator Lynn McDonald accepted the Museum Volunteer of the Year award. McDonald’s work with the volunteer program earned a nomination for Best Student Project for her highly successful Youth Apprentice program.
“Keith has had an unparalleled commitment to the Museum since his first contact 25 years ago when he was an ABAC student,” McDonald said. “Since his professional career brought him back to Tifton in 1995, he has been a wonderful volunteer. He has kept many things running on site such as the boilers of the cotton gin, steam train, and sawmill.

“Keith’s knowledge gained from working as a machinist has been invaluable to the museum. He has made many parts that cannot be purchased in today’s world for the museum’s century-old machinery. He is often driving the Vulcan steam locomotive and is also a lead volunteer with the museum’s newly refurbished sawmill.”

Rucker hosted a 10-man workshop in 2015 for an antique tools group which began refurbishing the A. J. Vance Planer/Matcher. He has also assisted in bringing the museum’s marketing into the digital world with his YouTube Channel, Vintage Machinery. Many of the 180 videos feature his work at the Museum. With 40,911 subscribers, the channel has planted the seed for some visits to the Museum, both from national and international guests.

“Keith was also very involved in the Save Our Steam train (SOS) fundraising event, the North Pole Express,” McDonald said. “He served on the planning committee, located giveaways, enlisted volunteers, and drove the train. He also spearheaded renovations of the train including getting the boiler sanded and repainted and checked for safety.”

Rucker served on the Agrirama Foundation Board from 2005-2009 and was president from 2007-2009. He worked with the transition of the board structure when the Museum began operating under ABAC in 2010. He then served on new board, the Friends of the Georgia Museum, where he was very involved with the research of the redesign of the sawmill boiler.
For more information about the Georgia Museum of Agriculture and Historic Village, interested persons can visit www.abac.edu/museum or call (229) 391-5205.

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