

Notes from the President

Georgia Institute of Technology

G.P. "Bud" Peterson, President

2017 Georgia Tour Blog Day Three – June 21

06/22/17

We have now completed our visits to 10 of the 12 cities on our ninth State Tour. The day's first stop was a visit with Board of Regents member Rusty Griffin, who represents Georgia 8th Congressional District on the board. Regent Griffin is an independent businessman and is very focused on how to increase the number of small and new businesses. Regent Griffin has worked with us to connect Georgia Tech experts with Valdosta leaders to help them explore an incubator in their area.

We then proceeded to "Nature Nate's," a honey-producing operation that **opened in Valdosta about a year ago**. Georgia Tech's Enterprise Innovation Institute (EI₂) is discussing partnership opportunities with Nature Nate's in Valdosta to help improve their processing and manufacturing operations.

From there, we were off to Thomasville, 43 miles west of Valdosta. We arrived just in time to enjoy lunch at the Glen Arven Country Club in Thomasville with an enthusiastic crowd of about 80 Yellow Jackets. A number of our Tallahassee, Florida, alumni took advantage of the meeting's proximity to join us, many driving long distances to join us. I was reminded that one of the local high schools, Thomas County Central, also features the Yellow Jacket mascot, and "it" looks a lot like our Buzz. If you like the "Six Degrees of Separation" game, Joe Burns, a Georgia Tech standout running back from 1998 to 2001, is a TCC alumnus who played four seasons for the NFL's Buffalo Bills. Joe's father, Joe Burns Sr., offered our invocation at lunch today, where I was also honored to meet the family of Yellow Jacket football standout P.J. Davis from nearby Cairo. State Rep. Darlene Taylor was on hand to present a resolution to P.J.'s family in recognition of his many accomplishments, including recently earning his Georgia Tech bachelor's degree.

We then traveled from the alumni lunch to a meeting in Camilla with Chairman Jay Powell, Georgia House of Representatives member from District 171. Rep. Powell chairs the House's Committee on Ways and Means, the body's chief tax-writing committee.

Then it was off to Albany for a visit to Thrush Aircraft, one of the top two manufacturers of "crop duster" aircraft in the country. The 280 employees of Thrush, including a number of interns from Georgia Tech, produce some of the world's top agricultural airplanes. They are used by operators at Dole Fresh Fruit, Del Monte Fresh Fruit, Aerovic, and FumiPalma, as well as many governments around the world. Thrush's versatile airplanes are flown in some 80 countries for such tasks as fertilizing crops, controlling insects, eliminating weeds, and fighting fires.

Thrush is a member of Georgia Tech Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) Lean Consortium, and GaMEP hosted a Lean Boot Camp there in April. As noted earlier on the tour, the Consortium allows companies to benchmark best practices and learn from each other through facility tours, training, and other methods. That evening, we networked with a lively group of about 100 Yellow Jackets at a reception at the Doublegate Country Club in Albany. We were also joined at the reception, and earlier in the day at Thrush Aircraft, by Georgia Tech faculty members who are part of Tech Provost Rafael Bras' Emerging Leaders Program.

Afterward, we traveled almost 40 miles to Americus, where we will spend the night after another long and fruitful day.

Another early start tomorrow morning, we hit the road on our way to Columbus in time for an early morning meeting with Board of Regents member Kessel Stelling and Georgia Rep. Calvin Smyre at Synovus Bank's headquarters.

G. P. "Bud" Peterson

Photos from Day 3:



The group toured Nature Nate's, a honey-producing operation that opened in Valdosta last year.



Bob Edmondson, Nature Nate's vice president of operations, gives President Peterson and Georgia Tech Vice President of Government & Community Relations Dene Sheheane a tour of the company's Valdosta facilities.



President Peterson and members of the Georgia Tech contingent lead Thomasville-area alumni in a rousing version of the Ramblin' Wreck fight song.



President Peterson enjoys a tour in Albany of Thrush Aircraft, one of the nation's leading producers of agricultural airplanes.



While at the Thrush Aircraft plant in Albany, President Peterson connected with Georgia Tech student interns Kyle Edmunds, Dylan Chiodo, Austin Braswell, and William Griffin.



Payne Hughes Jr. gives President Peterson a tour of the Thrush plant's interior in Albany. Hughes' father, Payne Hughes, owns the company.



President G.P. "Bud" Peterson chats with alumni at an evening gathering in Albany at the Doublegate Country Club.



Georgia House District 154 Rep. Winfred Dukes chats with Leslie Sharp, Georgia Tech associate vice provost for Graduate Education and Faculty Development.