

# 2017 ASA Convention

## Azaleas—Down on the Bayou

By *Allen Owings—Hammond, Louisiana*

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The Louisiana Chapter of the Azalea Society of America is looking forward to hosting the national convention in 2017 – “**Down On the Bayou.**” We will be headquartered in Hammond, LA – the Heart of the Florida Parishes. Hammond is located one hour east of Baton Rouge and one hour north of New Orleans. Peak azalea bloom in the Florida Parishes area is typically late March. Early blooms can begin in mid-February, and there is typically azalea flower color through early May before transition begins to the summer- and fall-flowering repeat bloomers.

We will have a great time in the area with tours to historical St. Francisville, stops at local nurseries and several evenings for garden touring, plant buying, dining and socializing at the **LSU AgCenter Hammond Research Station**, home to the Margie Jenkins Azalea Garden.

### Our Host Hotel

Our host hotel is the Courtyard by Marriott in Hammond located at 1605 South Magnolia Street. The hotel is convenient to many local dining options and a mile south of downtown Hammond. This is a new hotel facility – opening in 2016. Our board meeting will be held at the hotel in their board meeting room on Thursday afternoon. Early arrivers can pick up their registration at the hotel on Thursday afternoon. The group rate is \$109/night (deadline March 15, 2017). Call 985-956-7730 for reservations. [www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/hdccc-courtyard-hammond](http://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/hdccc-courtyard-hammond). Breakfast in the mornings is “on your own” at the hotel.

### Plant Sales, Dinners, and Evening Socials

Our plant sale, Thursday and Friday evening dinners and social times will be spent 5 miles from downtown Hammond at the LSU AgCenter Hammond Research Station located at 21549 Old Covington Highway.

The plant sale will be held on Thursday and Friday evenings while we are at the Hammond Research Station. Plants available will be a selection of plants from the Southern Living® Plant Collection, possible plants from Griffith Propagation Nursery in Georgia, and plants grown or collected at the station, and from local Louisiana growers and plant enthusiasts. Plants will not be for sale on Saturday, so buy early and buy often!

The Hammond Research Station was established as the Fruit and Truck Experiment Station in January 1922 to provide research for strawberry and truck-crop farmers. The Tangipahoa Parish Police Jury purchased the land from Ivy Byron Bankston at the request of the Hammond Chamber of Commerce. A tax (levied in two wards of Tangipahoa Parish specifically for the establishment of an agricultural experiment station) provided funds to purchase the land, which was then leased to Louisiana State University. This

station was the fourth to be established in Louisiana. The station consists of 140 acres.

In 1922, Boleslaus “Bill” Szymoniak was appointed superintendent and began the first research projects on strawberries and truck crops. Walter F. “Hody” Wilson Jr. was named superintendent in 1936 and remained in this position until 1975. Wilson’s primary interest was camellias, and he was responsible for the extensive plantings on the station. Dr. Bunnie W. Wascom was named superintendent in July 1975, and chemical weed control and turfgrass studies were added to the research program.

Dr. Roysell J. Constantin was appointed resident coordinator in August 1980. In 1983 the station became known as the Hammond Research Station and in 2001 became part of the AgCenter’s Southeast Region.

Dr. Regina Bracy became resident coordinator in 2004. Under Dr. Bracy’s direction, a new program, the Landscape Horticulture Research and Extension Center, was initiated to serve the nursery and landscape industry.

Dr. Allen Owings assumed the leadership of the station in the spring of 2016. In a few years, the station has become a dynamic site for landscape horticulture research and extension programs.

The Hammond Research Station is home to bedding plant trials, the Margie Jenkins Azalea Garden, the Hody Wilson Camellia Garden, a Piney Woods Garden, the largest evaluation of new crape myrtles in the southern United States, plant growth regulator research trials, and pest management studies on chilli thrips, crape myrtle bark scale and much more.

Bantaa’s Catering from Hammond will be providing a four-item entrée buffet on Thursday and Friday evenings at the station.

### St. Francisville Tour – Friday, March 30

**Imahara’s Botanical Garden** in St. Francisville is a privately owned garden developed and maintained by Baton Rouge area horticulture legend Walter Imahara. In 2003, Imahara purchased 55 acres along the backwash banks of the Mississippi River, located one mile from the historic town. He had a dream to plant a beautiful garden much like the one he spent his childhood years in, the historic Afton Villa Gardens. Azaleas and majestic live oaks, magnolias and reflecting ponds became the images from which a “legacy garden” would be built, a gift from him and his wife to be enjoyed by all. <http://imaharasbotanicalgarden.blogspot.com/>

We will also journey to the home and grounds at the historical **Rosedown Plantation** for a tour led by horticulturist Trish Aleshire. Now part of the Louisiana State Parks, staff and volunteers work to conserve and maintain the



Photo LSU AgCenter

▲ Fig. 1: Buddy Lee has a wealth of new plants in a new arboretum at new piece of property near Loranger, LA.



Photo LSU AgCenter

▲ Fig. 2: Margie Jenkins is looking forward to seeing everyone at her place during the 2017 convention.

▼ Fig. 3: Dr. Neil Odenwald, Fellow, ASLA, featured Friday night speaker.



Photo LSU AgCenter

1] See heat- and disease-tolerant Rhododendron studies, new breeding efforts with Louisiana’s native shrubs and more. Also hear Dr. John Thornton share his 45 years of Rhododendron breeding knowledge.

Lunchtime on Friday will be spent at **Bracy’s Nursery** and the beautiful home and outdoor living area of hosts Randy and Regina Bracy. Bracy’s Nursery started in mid-1980s and is now one of the largest wholesale production nurseries in Louisiana. Enjoy both food and plants. [www.bracys.com](http://www.bracys.com)

A stop at the nursery of legendary nurserywoman **Margie Jenkins** will conclude the afternoon of nursery visits. Margie will highlight some of her favorite plants and favorite azaleas in a “show and tell” presentation. This is not to be missed, and includes a dessert buffet. (Keep in mind—in Louisiana, we eat at every stop, so please pace yourself!) [Fig. 2]

### Speakers - Friday Night

**Dr. Neil G. Odenwald** [Fig. 3] will share with all of us his love of historical Louisiana gardens, gardeners, landscaping, and design. He was a professor and director of the LSU Robert Reich School of Landscape Architecture. Through his love of plant materials and planting design, Odenwald has made a significant impact on the people and gardens in the South. With a Master’s of Landscape Architecture from LSU and a PhD in Horticulture from Mississippi State University, Odenwald has a wealth of knowledge and understanding of all aspects of the garden. During his tenure as a professor and director of the LSU Robert Reich School of Landscape Architecture, Odenwald encouraged students to explore landscapes through travel in addition to using resources in their own backyard, such as Hilltop Arboretum.

Odenwald has written many books and coauthored, with James Turner, *Identification, Selection & Use of Southern Plants*, a staple in every gardener’s library. His hands have also been “in the dirt” at Rosedown Gardens, Afton Villa Gardens, Melrose Plantation, Longue Vue Garden, and New Orleans City Park. In addition, he has spoken at garden symposia and garden club meetings across the country.

site, conducting tours and programs to illustrate plantation life in the 1800s. In 2005, Rosedown Plantation was placed on the National Listing of Historic Landmarks. The gardens were the province of Martha Turnbull throughout her life. The Turnbells’ honeymoon in Europe included great formal gardens of France and Italy, an influence seen in Martha’s activities at Rosedown. The gardens grew out from the house over a span of many decades to cover approximately 28 acres. In the 19th century, Rosedown was one of the few privately maintained formal gardens in the United States.

[www.crt.state.la.us/louisiana-state-parks/historic-sites/rosedown-plantation-state-historic-site/index](http://www.crt.state.la.us/louisiana-state-parks/historic-sites/rosedown-plantation-state-historic-site/index)

### Nursery Tours – Saturday, March 31

We have been to **Transcend Nursery**, home of Buddy and Dixie Lee, during previous ASA national conventions in Louisiana. Join us again for their Southern hospitality and get to see Buddy’s current breeding and plant development efforts. Also, for the first time, the ASA group will venture to Buddy’s new arboretum a few miles up the road. [Fig.



Photo LSU AgCenter

▲ Fig. 4: Margie Jenkins and guest speaker, Dr. Mark Windham from UT Knoxville.



Photo LSU AgCenter

▲ Fig. 5: LSU AgCenter professor and illusionist David Himelrick, is featured at the Saturday night banquet.

Currently, the Robert Reich School of Landscape Architecture has raised funds to endow the Neil G. Odenwald Distinguished Professorship, which will be used to recruit and retain outstanding faculty at the school. In honoring and continuing Odenwald’s teachings, the professorship is focused on instruction in plant materials, planting design, and horticultural topics, ensuring these subjects continue to have a prominent place in the landscape architecture curriculum.

Plant pathologist **Dr. Mark Windham** [Fig. 4] from the University of Tennessee will present “Growing Disease Free Azaleas.” Dr. Windham earned a Ph.D. from North Carolina State. He has responsibility for research on diseases of ornamental plants at the Tennessee Agricultural Experiment Station. His research career has involved mildew resistant dogwoods and serving as chair of the Dogwood Research Team. At UT Knoxville, he teaches classes on plant pathology, diseases and insects of ornamental plants, and plant pathogenic fungi. He is also an expert historian of the Southeastern Conference.

**Dr. Rodrigo Valverde** will present “Virus Identification in Azaleas.” Dr. Valverde is a graduate of the University of Arkansas. As a plant pathologist with the LSU AgCenter, his main job responsibility is the development of a research program addressing diseases caused by viruses in Louisiana crops. Other duties include teaching a graduate course and

a laboratory on plant virology, directing graduate student research, and working with extension personnel on the diagnosis of viral diseases. The ASA Research Foundation Committee has funded his work with identification of viruses in Southern Indica azaleas.

### Annual Meeting, Banquet, Entertainment – Saturday Evening

To wrap up the convention, join us at the Mezzanine Event Hall, 308 South Cate Street in Hammond, for our awards banquet and entertainment. We hope to also have a preview of our planned ASA convention in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 2018.

Our dinner entertainment will be an encore presentation by **David Himelrick**, horticulture professor at LSU AgCenter. He will perform “Illusions of the Mind.” What our brain “sees” is influenced by our past experiences, imagination, and associations. He will keep you guessing as he uses the power of imagination to draw an image that exists only in someone’s mind! See more at [www.davidhimelrick.com](http://www.davidhimelrick.com)

Allen Owings is a horticulture professor at the LSU AgCenter Hammond Research Station. He directs activities at the station with a focus on research and outreach for the commercial ornamental horticulture industry. He is a life member of the Azalea Society of America and is the current president of the Louisiana Chapter.



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