
1999 CONVENTION AND ANNUAL MEETING

Maarten van der Giessen

Semmes, Alabama

Sponsored by the Louisiana Chapter

*I*t's time to return to the Azalea City! The 1999 Azalea Society of America's Annual Meeting and Convention will be held March 31 to April 2 at the historic Radisson Admiral Semmes in beautiful Mobile, Alabama. Those of you who remember the 1985 Convention know that this is a "good-doer" of a site. The Admiral Semmes, built in 1940 and renovated in 1985, is Mobile's oldest and most elegant hotel. It is conveniently located at 251 Government Street in the heart of old Mobile, just a couple of blocks from both the Dauphin Street entertainment district and the site of the original 1700's city of Mobile at Fort Condo. Limo service from the airport for three or more passengers is available for around \$6.00. Plan to reserve some time just to explore this grand old southern city. Information concerning religious services during the week for all denominations and faiths will be available at the registration desk.

Convention Overview

Mobile, Alabama is home to some of the largest and most innovative commercial azalea nurseries in the United States as well as some of the oldest and loveliest Southern Indica gardens in the world. Add in our Louisiana and Alabama hybridizers for spice, and you'll find the Azalea City an azalea gourmet's feast.

Wednesday night's featured speaker is Tom Dodd III of Dodd and Dodd Nursery. Tommy will introduce us to the fruit of his work of the past 20 years: the "Confederate Series." On Thursday evening, two of the most influential breeders in the South, Dr. Gene Aromi and Dr. John Thornton, will share their wealth of experience in hybridizing deciduous azaleas and heat tolerant rhododendrons. Our Friday night banquet will feature Jim Berry of Flowerwood Nursery. Mr. Berry is the International President of the International Plant Propagator's Society, a past president of the Alabama and South Alabama Nurserymen's Association. Mr. Berry will bring us up to date on the progress Flowerwood has made getting "new" azaleas into the retail trade through his division of Flowerwood, Plant Development Systems, Inc. (PDSI).

Wednesday Events

The convention officially opens at 3:30 Wednesday at the Admiral Semmes. The registration table will be located in the meeting room. The social hour and ASA plant sale will follow with doors opening precisely at 5:00. The unique and rare are always the first to go, so plan on being the first in line. Mr. Buddy Lee will greet our conventioners at 7:30, and the show is on!

Thursday Events

We'll board the buses at 8:30AM, bound for the gardens of Tom and Becky Root. This garden, formerly known as Clarke Gardens, was a prominent tour destination in the 1960's, featuring hundreds of azaleas and camellias set amidst

meandering woods and a mirror lake. With Mr. Clarke's passing in the early 1970's the garden was closed, never to reopen. The Roots purchased the gardens from the estate, and have helped the gardens recover from the devastation of hurricane Frederick in 1979, and hurricane Georges this past summer.

Bellingrath Gardens is our next stop. Bellingrath Gardens is one of the most well known azalea and camellia gardens in the deep south. This estate garden was built by Walter and Bessie Bellingrath and opened to the public in 1932. The gardens today occupy 65 of the more than 900-acre estate. Although known for its 200,000 azaleas on display in the spring, Bellingrath Gardens is a year round floral delight. The rose garden is breathtaking when its 2,000 roses are in bloom, and thousands of annuals are always in bloom to accentuate the natural beauty of the estate. The Bellingrath Home is a showcase of the many antiques and rare porcelain that Mrs. Bellingrath collected; also a large display of Boehm porcelain is on permanent display at the gardens.

From Bellingrath we venture across the Eastern Shore at Mobile Bay to Flowerwood Nursery's newest operation, PDSI. PDSI is the research and development center of Flowerwood Nursery, one of the ten largest nurseries in the United States. PDSI is responsible for patenting and promoting new plants, such as the "Red Hollies," the 'Flower Carpet' rose and the popular "Encore" azaleas. Here we will peer into Mr. Berry's crystal ball and see Flowerwood's vision of the future.

Our last stop Thursday is the garden of Mr. Bobby Green. Mr. Green is well known in horticultural circles for his camellia work with George Wright at Wintergardens Nursery. Bobby and George have traveled throughout the South collecting rare and exceptionally fine

old camellias to give them a second chance in the trade. His garden features these and several species azaleas from the 1940's.

Friday's Events

The buses roll at 8:30AM for the nerve center of the azaleas industry: Semmes, Alabama. With more than 200 registered nurseries in the Semmes area, it is the greatest wholesale azalea producer in the country.

We'll first stop at Dodd and Dodd Nursery. Tommy and Thayer Dodd produce a wide assortment of plants native to the Southeast. Of course, conspicuous in their inventory are the native azaleas particularly the "Confederate Series."

From the woodland azaleas we move on to the living room azaleas. The Blackwells have been a prominent nursery family in Semmes since the 1930's. Today they are the largest florist azalea operation in the deep south, shipping florist-quality azaleas as far as New York. The florist azalea is among the most beautiful and the most difficult plant in the nursery business to produce. The Blackwells make it look easy.

Ever tried to root an azalea? Our next stop rooted a million last year. Van der Giessen Nursery is a whole-

sale propagator of azaleas and woody ornamentals. We will visit their seven-acre greenhouse location for a "how to" demonstration, then a look at their azalea cultivar evaluation program and their display beds.

Magnolia Nursery holds perhaps the finest collection of native azaleas and ornamentals in Alabama. Bamboo, magnolia, trillium, you name it. The nursery is surrounded by and supported by the life-long collection of Dr. John Allen Smith. From azalea to zephyranthes there's always something in the garden to excite and amaze the most discriminating plant enthusiast. Dr. Smith will also show us his extensive collection of Aromi deciduous azaleas.

Finally we'll take a walk through Mobile Botanical Gardens. The gardens have gone through several metamorphoses in the past few years. New plants and new attitudes



Dodd hybrid Confederate Series 'Robert E. Lee'



Magnolia Gardens



'Centerpiece'—Aromi hybrid



Dodd hybrid Confederate Series 'Jeb Stuart'

are making this a garden worth exploring. This is the deep south, so take your time.

Saturday Events

The Board of Directors will meet from 9:00 to 11:00. The plant sale will

also be open from 9:00 to 10:00 for a final chance at those things you can't bring yourself to go home without. There's always room in the garden for one more!

We hope you'll have the opportunity to stay and visit Saturday with our Alabama and Louisiana friends, or just to wiggle your toes in the Gulf of Mexico. Information on "things to see, things to do" will be available at the registration desk. Come on down!



'Shipley'—Aromi Hybrid



'Red Ribbons'—Aromi Hybrid

Maarten van der Giessen attended Memphis State University from 1976-78, and majored in Chemistry at the University of South Alabama in Mobile, AL from 1979-1984. He worked for Cottage Hill Nursery; Container division in Mobile, AL as Propagation, Production, and finally Assistant Manager from 1985 to 1990. In 1990 he left Cottage Hill to start van der Giessen Nursery, Inc. in Semmes, AL with his father, Peter, where he is currently Vice-President and manager.

REPORT OF THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE

For President: William F. Bode, Covington, Louisiana. Bill retired as a hospital division manager for a pharmaceutical company. He is a past president of the Baton Rouge Men's Garden Club and a past president of the Louisiana Chapter of the Azalea Society of America. He has been interested in azaleas for 30 years.

For Vice President: Joseph E. Schild, Jr, Hixon, Tennessee. Joe Schild has owned and operated Schild Azalea Gardens and Nursery, a niche nursery specializing in natives, for over ten years. He is an avid hybridizer of deciduous azaleas and has a small number of the shrubs to be registered and trademarked as Schild Hybrids®. For over 30 years, Joe's love of our eastern species has drawn him into the wild in search of the best of the best to propagate. He says he finds no greater joy than when leading a group into the woodlands and mountains to introduce them to the wonders of our native species. Many of his accounts have been published in the *Journal-American Rhododendron Society*, **THE AZALEAN** and the Tennessee Valley Chapter of the ARS Newsletter. Joe currently is the Landscape Manager for Reflection Riding Arboretum and Botanical Garden in Chattanooga, Tennessee, as well as current Vice President and Program Chairman of the Tennessee Valley Chapter of the ARS, a member of the Oconee Chapter of the ASA and a member of the Tennessee Nurseryman's Association. He presents a number of programs with other chapters, garden clubs, civic clubs, and nursery trade groups each year and is listed with the ARS Speaker's Bureau.

For Director: Donald W. Hyatt, McLean, Virginia. Don has a Bachelor's degree in Biochemistry with a double major in Horticulture and a Masters degree in Computer Science. He has taught mathematics or computer science in the Fairfax County, Virginia, public schools for 28 years. Don has been

president of the Northern Virginia Chapter of the Azalea Society of America, and served on the Board of Governors in the Society's formative years. He has been hybridizing azaleas and rhododendron for over 30 years.

For Director: Col. Murray Sheffield USAF (Ret.), Wetumpka, Alabama. Murray made a career in the Air Force and served from 1941 until 1945 and 1948 until 1971. He has been gardening with azaleas for many years. He and his wife Inez have a four-acre garden with 4,000 azaleas in the ground (250 varieties). He has had good success working with thousands of cuttings, liners, and mature plants, both purchased and started from scratch.

For Director: Gen. Bryghte D. Godbold USMC (Ret.) Dallas Texas. Bryghte holds a Ph.D. degree from NYU. He is currently director of the Azalea Society of America and is Director Emeritus of the Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Gardens and the U.S. National Arboretum. He was Director of "Goals for Dallas" in 1963, a blueprint for development which led growth strategies for the city of Dallas into the 1990's.