

Nacogdoches—ASA's First Azalea City

Pam Fitch — Nacogdoches, Texas

Nacogdoches was recently named the nation's first "Azalea City" by the Azalea Society of America. In his letter of congratulations, Joseph E. Schild, Jr., chairman of the Azalea City Committee for the Azalea Society of America said, "The City of Nacogdoches has an active history of promoting and celebrating azaleas with various municipal, civic, and community events. Azaleas are obviously a part of the community culture and it is only fitting that your city should receive from the Azalea Society of America the certification as an ASA Azalea City."

Local officials were ecstatic after receiving word of the designation. This is national recognition of our efforts, and it will boost tourism to our community and the Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA) azalea garden.

According to Barbara Stump, project coordinator for the garden and research associate for Mast Arboretum development at SFA, "We appreciate this recognition of the hard work of the community in developing the Nacogdoches Azalea Trail and the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden. To be the first in the nation is a great tribute to what we have done together to beautify our city. With



Local dignitaries join in celebrating the first Azalea Society of America Azalea City designation. Pictured (left to right), Deputy City Manager Victoria LaFollett; Mrs. Patricia Mast; Dr. Mary Cullinan, SFA Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs; Dr. Scott Beasley, Dean of the Arthur Temple College of Forestry and Agriculture; Dr. David Creech, Director of the SFA Mast Arboretum; Robert "Buddy" Lee, President of ASA. (Photo by Ben Sultenfuss).

this honor we hope to encourage even more local residents and businesses to plant azaleas in our community."

Five years ago, the Nacogdoches Convention and Visitors Bureau partnered with SFA and the Flora Garden Club to establish the Nacogdoches Azalea Trail, which is held annually from late March through early April. The centerpiece of the event is the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden on the SFA campus. Visitors enjoy guided tours of the garden as well as a self-guided driving tour of the city's most beautifully manicured residential gardens. The event also includes an azalea symposium, floral exhibition, and plant sale.

Azalea season is our busiest tourist season of the year and the

Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden is a big part of it. The garden puts on quite a show and people are traveling here from across the South to see it.

Azalea Society of America President Robert Lee officially presented the award to City of Nacogdoches representatives at a public reception on November 5, 2004, in the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden. We are happy to welcome the Azalea Society of America's national convention to Nacogdoches in 2007.

Pam Fitch is executive director of the Nacogdoches Convention and Visitors Bureau.

We Need More Cities to Apply

The application process to become an Azalea City is very straightforward. Simply go to the Society Web site www.azaleas.org and click on the Azalea City option in the left margin. Or, you can contact Joe Schild, the selection committee chairman directly at the following numbers or addresses: 423-842-9686; 1705 Longview St., Hixson, TN 37343; azaleacity@mindspring.com