

# Never Enough—Post Convention Tours 2010

Robert “Buddy” Lee—Independence, Louisiana

Three days of ASA convention tours are usually enough for most “normal people.” However there is always that “fringe element” group that just never gets enough of azalea and garden tours. Then the most frightening of all is the “off the medication” person that always volunteers to coordinate and lead (using those words very loosely) this adventurous group to places where tour buses would never tread. Down dark alleys, winding back roads and alligator infested swamps that lead to secret garden and nursery sanctuaries that probably have never even been mapped by Lewis and Clark, or even GPS. These secret places, sometimes hidden in plain sight, are true treasures that are owned and maintained by the most pleasant and big-hearted people in the world.

Our travels began on the edge of the French Quarter in New Orleans. The weather was just right for garden tours here in Louisiana—clear blue skies and cool temps with a slight northwest breeze. Once out of the tangle of city streets and interstate overpasses, we motored north across the Lake Pontchartrain Causeway (a 24-mile bridge that was once considered the longest bridge in the world) to the piney woods and rolling hills of St. Tammany Parish. Riverside Nursery, the business and home place of **Jim Campbell**, would be our first place to visit. Riverside Nursery is located on the snowy white sandbanks of the beautiful Bogue Falaya River and, at one time, had many high pine and hardwood trees for overstory. However, Hurricane Katrina was not kind to this area, and numerous trees were lost, creating more sunny areas in the garden.

Jim has been collecting many different types of plants in his garden for many years, but his favorite garden plant, after azaleas of course, are camellias. Hundreds of camellias are planted along the winding woodland garden paths, and many of them were in full bloom during our visit. The greenhouses at the nursery were filled with many rare and unusual camel-

lias with spectacular blooms. On the edges of a large grassy area, large stands of bamboo of many different varieties created a distinct Asian atmosphere. Everyone wandered freely throughout the nursery and garden, finding many neat and unusual vines, ferns, groundcovers, shrubs, and trees. Jim was always handy to answer our many questions. He even gave an impromptu “hands-on” camellia grafting demonstration, which was a big hit. We could have stayed much longer; however, we needed to get on the road again to catch up with our schedule.

With hand-drawn maps in hand and their fearless leader at the head of the caravan, this little band of plant gypsies meandered northward toward the sleepy little town of Pine, Louisiana to the rhododendron garden of **Dr. John Thornton**. The first order of business, and to also keep up my fighting weight, was lunch at the locally famous Chinese Buffet in Franklinton. Here you can enjoy the exotic taste of the far East alongside Cajun southern deep-fried items. After a



Photo Robert “Buddy” Lee

▲ Jim Campbell, Steve Krebs, Mike Sykes walk through bamboo planted at Campbell’s garden in St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana.

▼ Jim Campbell demonstrates his camellia grafting technique.



Photo Robert “Buddy” Lee

▼ ASA members touring Jim Campbell’s camellia greenhouses.



Photo Robert “Buddy” Lee



hardy meal and good conversation, we were off to tour the southernmost rhododendron garden in the United States.

**Dr. John Thornton**, a retired veterinarian and owner of the garden, met us not far from the entrance. This garden was extremely close to the eye of Hurricane Katrina and suffered extensive damage. John, who tends the garden mostly by himself, had cleaned up much of the storm damage; however, a few downed large trees were still visible in the garden. The downed old trees added a unique artistic interest level to the 10-acre garden. Nestled in the garden along the pathways were large collections of native azaleas, rhododendrons, evergreen azaleas, and many different native shrubs and trees. John has done extensive breeding work with all the North American native azalea species. However he is most widely known for his breeding work crossing *Rhododendron hyperythrum* and traditional rhodies to create a group of heat- and disease-tolerant rhodies for the South.

John walked with the group answering questions and making comments about certain plants and pointing out many of his hybrids. Everyone was welcomed to take some of the plants that were in the small nursery area. This created great excitement among the group as people tried to decide which plants they wanted. With good-byes and thank yous

to John, we filed our cars out of the garden exit with some of the attendees heading back to New Orleans to catch flights back home and the rest of the group continuing on toward Semmes, Alabama, for another day of post tours.

The two-hour drive to Semmes, Alabama, took our group through the pine tree lined roads of South Mississippi. In some areas along the way, large areas of upland bogs with thousands of blooming pitcher plants added to the scenic drive. After checking into the hotel in Semmes and freshening up a bit, the group had a conversation-filled meal at one of the local diners.

Bright and early the next morning, and after a hearty breakfast, the remaining tour group members drove to van der Giessen Nursery. **Billy Lucas** greeted us at the nursery and basically set us free to roam the many greenhouses and plant-filled yards, which is a very special privilege at a wholesale nursery at the peak of shipping season. Like kids in a candy store, everyone went their own direction. This wholesale nursery grows an unbelievably wide selection of many different plant genera. Evergreen azaleas are their specialty and they grow many hard-to-get azalea varieties. They are the initial collectors and growers of the Aromi hybrids (Dr. Aromi was a very close friend).



Photo Robert "Buddy" Lee

▲ Dr. John Thornton (right) welcomes guests to his garden and nursery in Pine, Louisiana.



Photo Robert "Buddy" Lee

▲ Dr. John Thornton graciously gave plants to post-convention tour attendees.

▼ ASA members admiring Dr. John Thornton's plants.

▼ ASA members touring van der Giessen Nursery.



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# Society News

## Membership Renewals Due

Dan Krabill, ASA Treasurer

It is almost time for most of us to renew our memberships in the Azalea Society of America. Your membership expiration year appears on the top line of the address label for this issue of *The Azalean*. If the year 2010 appears on that line, your membership expires at the end of this year.

Dues notices are mailed in early November. If we get your check before November 1, you may take a \$1 "early bird" discount off the amount of the check. That's our thanks for not having to spend the time and money to mail you a dues notice. Or, if you know you are not going to renew, please let us know by letter or e-mail ([dkrabill@gmail.com](mailto:dkrabill@gmail.com)), so we will not have to mail you a dues notice.

First, review the information on your address label and make any needed corrections. Also, if your telephone number or e-mail address has changed, please provide us with the correct information.

Then, circle an amount in the table below to show the number of years and the type of membership you would like. The table includes a \$1 discount for each year paid in advance, up to \$5 per year. Those years are paid in full, even if the dues are increased later. For example, to renew for four years as a Regular Member, circle \$94 in the table.

Years	Regular	Contributing	Supporting	Endowment
1	\$25	\$50	\$100	\$200
2	\$49	\$99	\$199	\$399
3	\$72	\$147	\$297	\$597
4	\$94	\$194	\$394	\$794
5	\$115	\$240	\$490	\$990
6	\$135	\$285	\$585	\$1185

Subtracting \$1 for your "early bird" discount? [ ] Yes [ ] No

Or, consider joining for life, for the one-time payment of \$500 or five consecutive annual payments of \$100 each. Sorry, this is not available for organizations or overseas members.

Finally, write your check or money order in US dollars for the total amount, payable to the "Azalea Society of America." Mail it along with a copy of this page to:

Dan Krabill, ASA Treasurer  
6009 Copely Lane  
McLean, VA 22101-2507

Alternatively, you may pay your dues with a credit card online through Paypal (<http://www.paypal.com>). Send your dues payment to: [PayTheASA@aol.com](mailto:PayTheASA@aol.com). You can open a PayPal account in minutes (and if it asks, please mention [PayTheASA@aol.com](mailto:PayTheASA@aol.com) as the person who referred you). Then describe your changes, your membership type, and the number of years you are renewing for in the comments section.



▲ Maarten van der Giessen (center) answering plant questions from Bob Stelloh and John Brown.

▼ Ronald Hooper loads up a bunch of plant goodies after the post-convention tours.



**Maarten van der Giessen** arrived and greeted the group with friendly handshakes and hugs. Maarten and Billy answered many plant questions that day from this band of inquisitive plant enthusiasts. We probably stayed too long, but it's hard to leave a place that has so many different unique plants to see. Maarten and Billy were very generous with gift plants to the group, for which everyone truly appreciated. What a great tour!

Next on the tour was Mobile Botanical Gardens with its huge azalea collection and well designed beds and walkways. It was relaxing just to stroll along the walkways and trade plant stories among the group, occasionally checking labels on those azaleas we could not identify or just forgot the names. It was a busy two days of post tours; however, all good things must come to an end. But it's never too early to start thinking about next year's ASA convention and post-convention tours.

Thanks to everyone who attended the ASA 2010 convention in New Orleans. The Louisiana chapter of the ASA hopes everyone had a great time and that you will be back to visit with us soon.

**Robert "Buddy" Lee** is a past president of both the ASA and Louisiana Chapter. He is the developer of the multi-season-blooming *Encore® Azaleas*.