

# 2022 Annual Convention Summary

By Kathy Jentz—*The Azalean*, Editor

The Louisiana Chapter of Azalea Society of America hosted the society's 2022 Convention from Thursday–Sunday, March 10–13, 2022, in Lafayette, Louisiana. The hard-working Denise Lanclous planned and ran the event. She did a tremendous job “herding cats” and keeping everything on schedule.

Wildlife sightings were a particular highlight of this meeting with birds getting a starring role. Birders in the group swooned over stops at the Rip Van Winkle Gardens and Bird City Rookery on Jefferson Island and the nearby Avery Island's Jungle Gar-

dens. We even saw some resident alligators at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette's campus.

For the plant nerds amongst us, it was an absolute treat to be guided around the university grounds by Jim Foret, a horticulturist and consulting arborist. He led us through the campus' canopy of “Century Oaks” and explained the geography and soils of the region. He shared the planting and care details of the campus trees. (I, for one, came home with dozens of photos of the native Live Oaks.)

Those who drove or packed light came home with lots of plants to add to their home collections. We made a short shopping stop at All Seasons Home and Garden Nursery and the azalea sales each day during the conference back at the hotel were brisk.

The history of Lafayette and Louisiana was woven throughout the meeting with bus drives through historic and cultural districts and garden neighborhoods along with stops at several points of interest. The Good Hope Hall in Freetown-Port Rico Historic District is owned now by the Glen Armentor Law Offices. Our stop there included an explanation of Freetown's story and its importance during the reconstruction period of the South. For those who stayed on a bit, there was also an informal gathering at the Vermilionville Living His-

tory & Folk Life Park that depicts regional living conditions in various time periods.

The education programs included excellent talks by Dr. David Creech about his research and academic funding issues and Heather Kirk Ballard

about the new wave of gardeners we are experiencing. Buddy Lee of Encore® Azaleas gave a talk on the past, present, and future of azaleas. In the future section, he mentioned that azalea breeding is focusing on unusual shapes and colors of the calyx, trying to stabilize the colors of variegated blooms, developing more yellow

flowers, and plants with variegated foliage. He also mentioned the goal of achieving picotee edges, blotches, and stripes all on the same flower.

The ASA business meeting and awards presentations included accolades for several member volunteers who have gone above and beyond in their service to the Society. President Charlie Andrews stressed the need for more active chapters and for continual member recruitment for the continued success of ASA.

The food deserves a special mention here as it was a highlight of the conference. We enjoyed incredible hospitality University of Louisiana's Alumni Center and a private catered event at the McIlhenny family historic home to name just two of the wonderful group meals we experienced. Many of us left Louisiana a few pounds heavier and filled with lots of great memories.



**Pictured above, the group gathered at Jefferson Island by Kathy Jentz. See the convention photo collage on the back cover. Clockwise from top, left: Azalea Trail signage by Rick Bauer. A peacock at Jefferson Island by Shane Harris. Buddy Lee and Shane Harris by John Torbert. Temple at Jungle Gardens by Barbara Kirkwood. Group photo at the Alexandre Mouton House by Carolyn Beck. Gators and turtles at University of Louisiana at Lafayette by Rick Bauer. Bird Island by Rick Bauer. Rick and Susan Bauer boarding the Ragin Cajun buses. Check-in table by Rick Bauer. See many more convention photos posted at the ASA Facebook page.**