

Member Profile: Rick and Susan Bauer

Tell us about yourself and your background.

R: I was born in Queens, NY. My father was in the Army, so I had the opportunity to see much of the US and Europe growing up. I went to Mount Vernon High School in Alexandria, VA, after which I attended Cornell University, where I received a degree in Civil Engineering. I was commissioned in the U.S. Army and had two additional tours in Germany and various locations in the states. It was while assigned at Fort Monroe, VA, that I met Susan. After a 20-year career in the army, I retired and went to work for SAIC (now Leidos), where I did computer modeling work for an Army customer for 17 years.

I joined the Azalea Society (ASA) in 2002 and didn't participate much in society activities until the chapter president at the time, Eve Harrison, asked me to be chapter vice-president. That started greater involvement in chapter and society activities including multiple years as chapter vice president and later president. At the national level, I served as a director and later two terms as ASA president. I was co-chair of two national conventions and was heavily involved in the digitization of *The Azalean* and the creation of the Legacy Project.

I retired in 2011 and we moved from Northern Virginia to Yorktown, VA, and am now involved in Meals on Wheels and continue in various roles in the ASA.

S: I was born in a New Jersey on a small farm, about 50 miles south of New York City and not far from the shore. So, I enjoyed the benefits of a farm, a country community, adventures in the city, and the beach. My father enjoyed farming and also worked full-time. In his later years, my father started raising azaleas from cuttings. He had at least two greenhouses in which he raised primarily azaleas.

I retired after 35 plus years with the Departments of Defense and Army. I have had various positions as an efficiency and resource analyst, supervisor, branch and division chief, project and program manager, economic development advisor and resource/management consultant. After completing college with a degree in Economics and Finance, I relocated to Germany and worked for the US Army in Nuremberg for four years. From Germany, I transferred to Hampton, VA, where I continued to work for the US Army, at Headquarters, Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), Fort Monroe. This is where I met the most wonderful man in the whole world, Rick. The perfect guy for me. After we married, I transferred to Stuttgart, Germany,



Susan and Rick Bauer at the ASA National Meeting in 2015 in Nacogdoches, Texas, in front of the magnificent, long bed of 'Koromo Shikibu' at the Stephen F. Austin State University Gardens. Photo by Bil Miller.

where I worked for the Army's Headquarters, 7th Corps. At the time, 7th Corps was the largest corps in the free world (7th Corps and General Franks–Desert Storm 1991). I was a branch chief in the Manpower Division and then became the Division Chief focused on the supporting elements of the corps' daily community elements and family life. There, I was able to implement computer technology to improve analysis and better support the corps manpower processes. Even though this job was far more demanding than my last tour, it was a wonderful time, and I got to meet many of Rick's family members who live in Germany.

From Stuttgart, Rick and I relocated to Northern Virginia, and I transferred to a position at Fort Belvoir. From there I transferred to the Pentagon, where I retired in 2006. In my last position, I functioned as an organization and mission problem-solver for the Office of the Comptroller of the Army.

Following retirement from Federal service, I worked for one year as a contractor—to support an Army initiative to improve the organizational environment and implementation of a critical program.

In 2001, I became a Jin Shin Jyutsu (JSJ) practitioner. Jin Shin Jyutsu is a 3,000-year-old energy harmonizing (healing) modality, which helps both humans and animals with physical and emotional issues. Since my retirement, I have dedicated my time to education and training, so that I can help others and in some small way give back. I have become a practitioner of several additional modalities that can help improve an individual's quality of life. The following two are provided as examples: I am a Certified Life Coach and Transpersonal Hypnotherapist. I am also on the board of our church, and am quite involved in all its support roles for the church's community.

Rick and I joined the Northern Virginia Chapter in 2002. Because of my work and travel, I was not able to participate much other than attend meetings. I did provide some support at the 2009 convention with box lunch delivery and was heavily involved in the 2016 convention. During the 2016 convention, I worked at the plant sale (averaging a sale every 12 seconds on the first night), distributed box lunches at several sites, and filled in when folks were ill or unable accomplished their assigned tasks.

In 2014, I took over management of *The Azalean* back issues and preparation of the society's welcome packets. As I inventoried the back issues, I took time to review some of the articles and pictures. I quickly realized that the back issues contained valuable information that should be available to the members in a real time basis. Digitization was the answer. I made the recommendation to the ASA board in 2015 and with a team of willing cohorts all of *The Azalean* magazine back issues are available on the ASA website. I also made a number of improvements in the welcome packet, to include reducing the costs of preparation and mailing.

Who are your influences?

R: In the society, I have been impressed by the knowledge of many individuals, however many of my accomplishments have been influenced by Paul and Carolyn Beck. Paul's computer skills have been invaluable at the chapter and society level. They have allowed us to accomplish so much in moving the society forward. The fantastic website(s), plant database, member database and point-of-sale systems are just some of his contributions. Carolyn's knowledge and propagation efforts have not only contributed to the chapter and the society's financial health, but were the inspiration for the Legacy Project. There are too many other people to list who have assisted me and who I have learned from, but the most notable include Don Hyatt, Aaron Cook, George McLellan, and Allen Owings. I'm also excited to see younger members such as Patrick Thompson, Shane Harris, and Steve Wright contributing to the society and the promotion of azaleas.

S: I grew up in a farming family. And a family of strong, smart, and hard-working women. My mother kept the farm going on a daily basis, while my dad went to work. My aunts in Arkansas were excellent farmers and farm managers in their own right. One aunt owned and ran a fish farm, taking it from its infancy, right after my uncle passed, to a business that ships fish around the world. I gravitate towards strong, smart women. And there are plenty in the ASA. Some may be quieter than others in their speech and action.

Yet, they are smart, knowledgeable, and know just what to do. Just look at Carolyn Beck, Barb Kirkwood, Lindy Johnson, Margie Jenkins, Joanne Neckel, and Elizabeth Cosby. I very much appreciate knowledgeable people—to expand my knowledge base and horizons. Folks like Don Hyatt, Paul and Carolyn Beck, David Nanney, and Bill Miller.

Other than azaleas, what other plants do you like to grow or collect?

R: I like a number of different companion plants including hostas, viburnum, lantana, some rhododendron, and gardenias. I like to try and have plants that provide garden interest year-round. This is difficult in the winter; however I was inspired years ago by a talk by George McLellan on the winter garden. This resulted in the addition of hellebores, camellias, witch hazel, and Japanese apricot to our garden.

S: I truly love and enjoy all plants, especially those that flower or have different leaf textures so that there is something interesting to look at year-round. One of my favorite winter window views is our huge Southern Magnolias. We even named them Maggie and Molly. I have very good luck propagating gardenia cuttings. In fact, all of our gardenia bushes are the result of my propagation efforts.

What got you started on collecting azaleas?

R: I first became aware of azaleas in high school. A neighbor across the street would sell them in the spring. I seem to recall they cost something like \$2.50 for a 2–3 gallon plant. My parents bought a few for the family home. Being in the military and moving around, I didn't do much in the way of collecting until I retired. In 1995, we purchased a home on 2 ½ acres in Yorktown, VA. We started collecting and planting azaleas, selecting them because we liked the way they looked. Initially, we planted most of them along the periphery of the property since our plan was to eventually tear down the old house and replace it with our retirement home. This approach served us well, especially in the case of 'Formosum'. We had no idea what the characteristics of the plant were and were later happy that we planted it on the edge of the property as it is now 12 feet tall and about 20 feet wide!

When we eventually tore down the old house and replaced it, I was able to move many mature azaleas and gardenias from elsewhere on the property to the front of the house. Our builder was amazed at the result since the large, mature plants made the house look like it had been there for years. Since the front of the house faces generally south, we put in only Encore® varieties since they not only provided the benefit of multiple

and long-lasting blooms, but also tolerated the open southern exposure as well.

As our knowledge of azaleas grew, due to our membership in the Azalea Society, and with the establishment of the Legacy Project, we started focusing on collecting Legacy varieties, especially those of chapter hybridizers. We started Legacy gardens for Stewart, Holly Springs, Robin Hill, Bowie Mill, McDonald, and Klimavicz azaleas. We are now in the process of adding Marshy Point and Schroeder azaleas. While our initial focus was evergreen azaleas, we have branched out to deciduous. The primary varieties are Aromi, Beasley, and Confederate along with natives.

S: My father was a part-time nurseryman and raised azaleas as I was growing up. I supported Rick's efforts in collecting azaleas. In fact, I am a big supporter—adding to his collection whenever there is an ASA plant sale or exchange.

Which are your favorite(s) azaleas?

R: I like the Encore® hybrids for their color and long-lasting bloom. As far as individual azaleas go, my favorites include 'Brenda Marie' (Klimavicz), 'My Mary' (Beasley), 'Amelia Rose' (Aromi), and 'Midnight Flare' (Harris).

S: 'Marie Susan Melkovitz' (Stewart) is my favorite. It is named after my mom.

Any advice for beginner azalea collectors?

R: In the beginning, I would suggest just buying azaleas that appeal to them. Care needs to be taken, however, in selecting varieties which are suited for their plant zone and lighting/soil conditions. Later, they may develop goals in developing their collections, such as selecting from a particular hybrid group(s), bloom times, colors etc. Joining the ASA and using the ASA website resources are ways to increase one's knowledge of azaleas and assist in developing their collection goals.

S: Join an ASA Chapter and leverage information from the chapter, Society, and website and our excellent publication, *The Azalean*.

Can you tell us about the Legacy Project and your involvement in that?

R: As I stated earlier, I joined the society in 2002, but wasn't very active until 2007. In 2009 the Northern Virginia Chapter sponsored the ASA convention in Herndon, VA. One of our speakers had to cancel at the last minute due to health issues and I was asked to give a presentation on Holly Springs and Stewart Azaleas. I knew almost nothing about azaleas in general

and even less about the two hybrid varieties, but here I was giving a presentation to a bunch of azalea experts! Needless to say, I was very nervous, but managed to get through it with the help of experts in the audience. Previously, I hadn't given much thought to different "families" of azaleas and, in particular, I wasn't aware of the hybridizers in our chapter who produced the Klimavicz, Holly Springs, Stewart, and McDonald hybrids, among others. I also noticed that they were not widely available in the industry and perhaps were not that well-known outside of a group of azalea enthusiasts. Carolyn Beck was doing a great job of propagating and making these varieties available in convention and local plant sales, but I didn't see them available widespread throughout the industry. This led to the establishment of The Legacy Project in the Northern Virginia chapter.

We basically documented guidelines on what we were already doing locally in the chapter to promote the azaleas developed by chapter members. Initially this included things such as propagating, selling at convention and public plant sales and writing articles and giving presentations on the varieties. This later got expanded to introducing these varieties to "Legacy Gardens" and to "Legacy Nurseries."

The project was later introduced at the ASA level and was approved by the Board of Directors as a society project. Paul Beck did an outstanding job of developing a platform for providing this information to the general public through the ASA azalea database and the establishment of the Legacy Project pages on our website.

We now have individual Legacy Projects sponsored by members in multiple chapters of the society. It has even spread to the American Rhododendron Society, where the Potomac Valley Chapter has sponsored a Marshy Point Legacy Garden at London Town Gardens in Maryland and the Azalea Chapter has developed a Sommerville Legacy Garden at the Wright Environmental Education Center in Georgia.

The Legacy Project document (available on the ASA website) has a number of suggestions of things to do to perpetuate the legacy of a hybrid group. It can be daunting, but the whole project doesn't have to be adopted at once. I like to say, "Don't let what you can't do, keep you from doing what you can!"

S: The Legacy Project started out with the NoVA Chapter and has expanded to other Chapters and grown in depth of content and information. It is an excellent program for maintaining the history of an azalea, as well as making sure the plant is around in the future.