



Vol. 47 • No. 4 • Winter 2025

The Azalean

Journal of the Azalea Society of America

President's Letter

Aaron Cook—Hendersonville, North Carolina

Fall was spectacular here in western NC and our dahlia, rose, and aster blooms provided color into November. Now we move into the season of conifers and the bright stems of *Cornus stolonifera*, and *C. sanguinea*—soon to be followed by snowdrops and hellebores.

In preparation for this letter, I did two things. First, I went back and read every past Winter issue President's Letter in *The Azalean*. Did you folks know that some issues don't have a President's Letter? Most of the letters talk about changes in the Society, a summary of the year's events, the wishing of Happy Holidays to all, and an invitation to attend the annual spring convention. In many letters, there are the underlying themes of declining enrollment and raising costs. The other thing I did was to go through the complete list of 471 members to see how many I knew personally. It saddens me to say that I am only acquainted with about 150 of you. That means that I do not know almost two-thirds of our members.

It occurred to me that I developed relationships with most of you through attending our annual convention. This spring will be our 49th annual convention. Conventions are the best way to get to know fellow azalea enthusiasts and gardeners.

Beginning with this issue, we take a look back at our history through a five-part series. The series will cover ASA conventions for 10 years at a time. It has been a great pleasure to read and compile accounts by Charles Evans and Otto E. Henrickson about our first 10 annual meetings. I hope you enjoy this look back as much as I have. My sincere thanks go to William C. Miller III, who provided advice, photographs, and help in editing the article.

Our first three ASA annual meetings were single day affairs, held around the Washington, DC-area. In 1982, the fourth ASA national meeting and convention was held in Richmond, VA, and was hosted by the Richmond Chapter of the ASA and the Middle Atlantic Chapter of the ARS. The program included lectures, a plant sale, and private garden tours. This was the first multiday convention and set the precedent for all future ASA annual conventions. Since 1982, almost every convention has been hosted by an active ASA Chapter.

For the 2026 Convention, we are once again trying something new. The Azalea Society of America is the official host for this convention. Since this is not a Chapter-sponsored event, we are trying to keep costs as low as possible. Toward that end, the registration for this convention has been set at \$250. Please make plans now to join your azalea friends in Athens, Georgia, this spring for our annual "family reunion." We will have a wonderful time, visit some beautiful gardens, and make new friends.

I will do all the things that I usually do every winter. I will pour over catalogs and plant society journals as I plan for next year's garden. I will start seeds in my grow room, and receive and distribute seeds for the seed exchange. I will continue to work on Azalea Society business. However, I will also spend time getting to know more society members, hopefully instilling in them the joy and excitement of becoming more active members.

In closing, I hope your gardening year was fantastic and that you had a great holiday season with family and friends.

~ *Aaron*



The Azalea Society of America, organized December 9, 1977 and incorporated in the District of Columbia, is an educational and scientific non-profit association devoted to the culture, propagation, and appreciation of azaleas which are in the subgenera *Tsutsusi* and *Pentanthera* of the genus *Rhododendron* in the Heath family (Ericaceae).

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Rick Bauer

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The Azalean (ISSN-1085-5343) is published quarterly (spring, summer, fall, and winter) by the Azalea Society of America, Inc. For information, contact Mrs. Denise R. Lanclos, 132 Oakview Blvd., Lafayette, LA 70503.

To order copies: Send a check payable to the ASA Treasurer, to 2963 Fort Lee St., Oak Hill, VA 20171 or order online at <https://www.azaleas.org/azalean-online>. Please include \$3 per copy for US delivery, \$5 per copy for Canada or Mexico, and \$8 per copy for overseas delivery.

Opinions and views expressed in *The Azalean* are those of the contributors or editor, not necessarily those of the Society, and are presented to foster a wider appreciation and knowledge of azaleas. Advertisements are presented as a service to readers and do not imply endorsement by the Azalea Society of America.

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Printed By: **Complete Printing**
Carthage, Texas

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Deadlines for *The Azalean*:

- Spring 2026 issue is due January 15, 2026
- Summer 2026 issue is due April 15, 2026
- Fall 2026 issue is due July 15, 2026
- Winter 2026 issue is due October 15, 2026

Remember, you too can write for *The Azalean*! To submit your articles and photos for publication, contact: theazalean@gmail.com.

On the Cover

The Floyd Garden in Athens, Georgia, will be part of the ASA 2026 Convention tours. Photo by Mike Floyd.



In Memoriam: Pete Vines

By Rick Bauer and Carolyn Beck—Northern Virginia Chapter

It is with great sadness that we report that Northern Virginia chapter member and noted azalea hybridizer, Pete Vines, of Amelia Island, FL, passed away on September 5, 2025. Pete retired from the U.S. Army in 1982 as a colonel after 30 years of service. He joined the Northern Virginia Chapter of the ASA in 1980.

Ronald Cassell “Pete” Vines Sr. grew up in Beckley, West Virginia. He graduated from the University of Mississippi in 1952 and entered the U.S. Army. He married his wife Wilma (Peggy) Vines in 1954. His tenure in the army took him to a variety of locations in the United States and in Asia, including one tour in Korea and two in Vietnam, as well as 23 relocations. Pete was both a helicopter and fixed wing pilot, and his favorite flying was during an assignment to Alaska where he was able to traverse the Arctic with its beauty and wildlife and land on Denali. He also attended the Naval War College in Newport, RI.

He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star with two Oak Leaf clusters, the Purple Heart with two Oak Leaf clusters, and a Legion of Merit for Valor and Combat.

Pete developed his love of plants from his father and grandfather. His father, Woodrow Wilson (Buck) Vines, was an avid gardener and loved unusual forms of azaleas, such as those with strap petals. Pete named one of his strap petal hybrids ‘W. W. Vines’ in his honor. In 1970, after Pete returned from his second Vietnam tour, Buck asked him to help raise 500 small azaleas in his Virginia yard. Within a year, Pete was hooked. Pete’s brother had an extra lot in Richmond, where Pete moved the plants and heeled them in. He started propagating these varieties.

Pete started a nursery in 1979, Vines Horticultural Garden, in Springfield, VA, and started hybridizing azaleas. He named his hybrids “Holly Springs” azaleas, after the town of Holly Springs, Mississippi, near his alma mater, the University of Mississippi. His goal in developing these hybrids was to produce plants with larger blooms (greater than 3 inches), dwarf to mid-sized growth habit (3 feet or smaller in 10 years), extended bloom season, variability of bloom color and increased cold hardiness (down to -20°F). Cultivars were selected for naming after lengthy testing and rating. Over 41,000 seedlings were produced from 451 crosses.

As part of his preparation for his hybridizing program, Pete collected hundreds of cultivars from other hybrid groups. From these, he chose what he considered the best potential parents. Among them were selections from Back Acres, Eden, Harris, Girard, Glenn Dale, Robin Hill, Linearifolium, Linwood, Mossholder, Roehr, Rutherford, Satsuki, Shammarello, Sonoma Dwarf, and Southern Indian. As he began to identify superior clones from his program, these were added to the parent pool.



Pete with Vines family members at the 2022 Holly Springs Legacy Garden dedication at the Jenkins Arboretum. Photo by Rick Bauer.

His most successful cross was ‘Nancy of Robinhill’ × ‘Shinnyo-no-tsuki’. Eleven cultivars from this pairing were named: ‘Holly Springs Double Delight’, ‘Jeffery Alan’, ‘Nightingale’, ‘Orange Fluff’, ‘Peggy Vines’, ‘Holly Springs Pink Parfait’, ‘Poignant’, ‘Rose Gutierrez-Kolb’, ‘Saint Moritz’, ‘Virginia Vines’, and ‘Holly Springs Whipped Cream’. Pete declared this cross his best. By far, ‘Peggy Vines’ was his favorite. He was very proud of this cultivar.

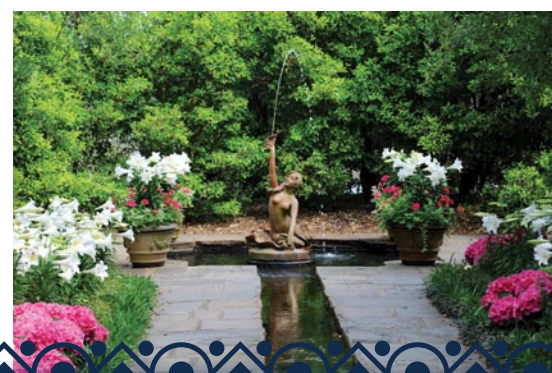
Pete’s nursery, Vines Horticulture Gardens, was on a mere third of an acre that surrounded his home, and offered “rare and unusual azaleas for the discriminating collector.” In spite of space constraints, in 1990, approximately 1,700 varieties, including 84 of his hybrids, were available for sale. To assist his customers, he produced a yearly catalog listing cultivars, along with detailed descriptions.

In 1991, Pete moved to Amelia Island, FL, where he continued to make crosses on a limited basis. Currently there are 102 named and registered Holly Springs varieties in the Azalea Society of America’s (ASA) database.

The Holly Springs azaleas are a Legacy variety in the ASA’s Legacy Project. One of the output products of the project is the creation of Legacy Gardens. Jenkins Arboretum in Devon, PA, was interested in developing a Holly Springs Legacy Garden and in working closely with the Northern Virginia Chapter, developed the garden, which was dedicated in May 2022. Pete, his friend Jean Mauldin, and members of the Vines family were able to attend the dedication and meet Jake Summers, the Jenkins Hamilton Educational Fellow, who designed and coordinated the development of the garden. Jenkins Arboretum sponsored and was also on the itinerary of the 2025 ASA convention. We were pleased to see Pete again and have the opportunity to see the growth of the garden after three years.

Pete will be greatly missed by those who had the pleasure of knowing him. Our condolences go out to the Vines family and to his longtime friend Jean.

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Preview of the 2026 ASA Convention: Athens Azaleas—A Classic Tradition

By Charles R. Andrews III—Cumming, Georgia

The 2026 ASA National Convention will be held in Athens, Georgia, on the banks of the Oconee River, from Sunday, April 12, to Wednesday, April 15, 2026. Athens is the home of the University of Georgia, chartered in 1785, the oldest state-chartered public university in the United States. Athens was named in 1801 for the Greek center of culture and learning in ancient times. William Bartram passed near this area on his way to Mobile and Baton Rouge in 1775. He documented seeing native azaleas along his journey. Nurseries, such as Fruitland Nursery in Augusta, Georgia, began selling evergreen azaleas in the latter half of the 19th century throughout the Southeast, where they thrived in places like Athens, the Classic City. Athens azaleas are a classic tradition.

Athens is a little less than 80 miles from the Atlanta airport, 1.5 to 2 hours, depending on traffic. There is a shuttle service available from the airport to Athens. Check the internet for the latest available choices.

Our host hotel is Springhill Suites Athens West, a Marriott hotel, 3500 Daniells Bridge Road, Athens, GA 30606, (706) 353-8484. The rate is \$149 per night, plus taxes and lodging fees and is valid for an extra day or two after the convention. Parking is complimentary. Buffet breakfast is included. You can call the number above to make your reservations (mention the Azalea Society to get the special reduced rate) or use the hotel reservation web link on our ASA web site (<https://azaleas.org/convention-2026/>). The cut-off for reservations at this rate is March 13 and the block of rooms is limited, so book early.

Sunday, April 12

Check-in and registration will be open at the hotel from 12:00noon until 5:00pm. There will be an ASA board meeting at 3:00pm. Join us for a Meet-and-Greet from 5:00–6:30pm. During this time, Dr. Todd Lasseigne, Executive Director, Bellingrath Gardens, Theodore, Alabama, will speak to us about recent efforts to revitalize azaleas at Bellingrath. On Sunday evening, dinner will be on your own.

Monday, April 13

Breakfast is included in your hotel reservation. The day will include two very interesting tours: the State Botanical Garden of Georgia and White Oak Gardens, the private estate of Dale Berrong, with lunch at the

State Botanical Garden. Details of the tours are below. On Monday evening, dinner will be on your own.

Tuesday, April 14

Breakfast is included in your hotel reservation. The tours for Tuesday include three delightful private gardens: Allen Armitage Garden, Mike & Susan Floyd Garden, and Ram & Tom Giberson Garden. We will have lunch at Oconee Veterans Park near Watkinsville, Georgia. Dinner and the ASA annual meeting will be held at the Athens Country Club. Immediate Past President Charles Andrews will give a presentation on Georgia azalea hybridizers.

Wednesday, April 15

Breakfast is included in your hotel reservation. Your registration package will contain information on nurseries, additional gardens, and many other interesting things to see in Athens and the greater Athens area. Take some extra time to tour on your own.

Tour Descriptions

Our garden tours have been planned and designed not only to give you the opportunity to see some delightful gardens but also to fill your notebook and mind with outstanding gardening ideas and a checklist of wonderful plant material that you want for your garden.

The State Botanical Garden of Georgia

The State Botanical Garden is a 300+-acre preserve that was set aside by the University of Georgia in 1968 for the study and enjoyment of plants and nature. It's a "living laboratory" for the university and the public. The garden contains a wide variety of natural features and habitats common to the Georgia Piedmont area and a number of specialty gardens and collections. The State Garden is made up of several different gardens. The Native Flora Garden will be the obvious place to find our native azaleas in bloom. Georgia has more indigenous species than any other state. The Heritage Garden is a collection of plants that have been important to our region of the country. There are also lovely blooms in the spring from azaleas to dogwoods. The International Garden explores how plants were discovered and cultivated in different times and places, including the Middle Ages, Age of Exploration, and here in North America by Native Americans. There is also the Shade Garden, the Flower Garden, and the Herb and Physic Garden.



White Oak Gardens

Dale Berrong established White Oak Gardens (*pictured above*) in 2008 on 225 acres of wooded land, and it serves as the private home of Dale Berrong and his wife, Jerri. Situated in Madison County, approximately 15 miles from Athens, GA, the property features dramatic elevation changes up to 175 feet and 4 streams, amidst mature stands of southern hardwoods. The gardens have a natural, informal woodland design, showcasing tens of thousands of plantings of both evergreen and deciduous azaleas, other rhododendrons, Japanese maples, magnolias, camellias, and many other species. A greenhouse and several nursery areas support the ongoing cultivation and introduction of new plants, with three to five thousand propagated plants added each year as part of Dale's continuous development process.

The Armitage Garden

Dr. Allan Armitage is the well-known author and retired professor of herbaceous plants at the University of Georgia. Allan and his wife, Susan, bought their house in 2011. It was a student rental house of 900 square feet in sad condition on a 60-by-100-foot lot. Today it is a beautiful home of 1,700 square feet with spectacular front and rear gardens with a large backyard porch designed to bring the rear garden ("The Secret Garden") into full view.

Their home is in a neighborhood of high-demand driven by proximity to the university and people moving from Atlanta to enjoy a small-town atmosphere. The garden was a true project. The site originally had a red clay base to which Allan added an annual load of compost—about an inch per year. Allan filled the space as follows: At the ground level, groundcovers, low perennials, and annuals. Next are shrubs. Finally, he added vines such as clematis and honeysuckle to climb on the shrubs. Beginning with a lone pecan tree

already on the property, Allan added annuals, woody plants, and native azaleas, always being cognizant of morning and afternoon sun exposure. His favorite larger plants of interest are Japanese maples, which add variety to the garden. He has about 10 of them, each with different color bark and leaf colors. One very striking maple is a 'Bihou' Japanese maple with yellow bark. Ferns and hydrangeas are each carefully located to keep them in morning sun. Native azaleas and other woody plants are combined with climbing plants such as clematis. Allan plants other groundcovers right up against native azaleas, thus having up to four different plants in the same space. His technique is very efficient and visually appealing. This garden shows what a plant expert can do.

The Floyd Garden

The Floyd Garden may be small, but here you can really enjoy native azaleas. Mike and Susan Floyd have lived at their one-acre subdivision lot since 1986. Upon their retirement in 2014, their gardening interest expanded into native azaleas and Japanese maples. Their large collection of native azaleas includes both species and hybrids. These are incorporated into their flower beds with hydrangeas, daylilies, camellias, and evergreen azaleas. Their large and diverse collection of hybrid native azaleas includes selections from Aromi, Beasley, Sommerville, Strickland, Whiddon, Koone, Abbey, Greenleaf, and Dodd.



The Giberson Garden

The Giberson Garden of Ram and Tom Giberson is an incredible garden (*pictured above*). It is painting masterpiece with a large palette of plants, water features, boulders, and elevation. Containing both native and introduced plants, the garden of a little over an acre and a half is filled with hundreds of different genera and species in overwhelming combinations. Plants are tightly packed. Paths lead in multiple directions. Along the paths and patio areas are many container plants. The sound of water is everywhere. Multiple waterfalls and streams flow throughout. Koi swim in ponds. Foliage, texture, and color delight the eyes. And among all this beauty, one can find azaleas and other rhododendrons.



Speaker Programs

~ Sunday, April 12

Dr. Todd Lasseigne: “Bellingrath Gardens’ Re-emergence as an Historic, Yet Forward-looking Public Garden”

Bellingrath Gardens has been known for decades for its rich displays of azaleas going back to its founding days in 1932 when they were first revealed to the public. Sadly, Bessie Morse Bellingrath’s collection is long gone, and the current state of this once immense collection, which dominated the gardens, had dwindled to 20 cultivars of evergreen azaleas. In 2023, work commenced to reverse this tide, with initial work focusing on expanding the number of evergreen cultivars to over 500 and upcoming work is focusing on collecting a diverse assemblage of both deciduous azalea species (including wild collections) and cultivars. Todd Lasseigne will showcase how Bellingrath is working to re-emerge at the forefront of azaleas as an historic, yet forward-looking public garden.

~ Tuesday, April 14

Charles Andrews: “Georgia Hybridizers”

Georgia has been fortunate to have some noted azalea hybridizers. Charlie Andrews will tell us about the evergreen azalea hybridization of Ralph Pennington and

James Harris; the native azalea hybrids of Aaron Varnadoe, George Beasley, Fred Galle, and Earl Somerville; and John Kohli’s evergreen and native hybrids.

Plant Sale

One of the favorite attractions at our conventions is our plant sale where you can get special plants at great prices. Both native and evergreen azaleas and some surprises will be waiting for you. The plant sale room at the host hotel will be open Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday evenings and Wednesday morning.

Convention Website

More details, including the convention registration form, is available on the ASA website at <https://www.azaleas.org/convention-2026/>

Registration Fee

The 2026 convention registration fee is \$250 per person until March 13, 2026 and then \$300 up to April 1, 2026. Registration is open to members of ASA and their guests. Registration is 100% refundable until March 13, 2026. The fee covers all tours (including transportation, snacks, and entrance fees), light refreshments at the Meet-and-Greet Sunday evening, lunch meals on Monday and Tuesday, and dinner at the Athens Country Club on Tuesday. Dinners on Sunday and Monday are on your own. Breakfast is covered by your host hotel reservation. Special needs (meals, etc.) should be entered on your registration form. Gluten-free and vegetarian meals will be available. You may register and pay online at the ASA website or use the printed registration form enclosed with this issue’s mailing, fill it out, and mail it in with a check. Register for the convention and book your hotel reservation early. Hotel rooms are limited. There is a late fee for registration after March 13.

About the Author

Charles Andrews is the Immediate Past President of our society and on the planning committee of the 2026 convention.



So you want to learn more about the lovely Glenn Dale Hybrid Azaleas?

The Azalea Works in Bethesda, Maryland, has two books by Bill Miller and the late Dick West which detail the fascinating story about B.Y. Morrison, the 454 Glenn Dale cultivars, and the unpublished PI and Bell Numbers by which they were managed. For details, see the website at:

www.theazaleaworks.com

While you're at it, visit the extensive collection of azalea, companion plant, and animal .jpg images.

Member Profile: Harold Belcher

My love of azaleas started when I was a teenager in the 1960s living in nearby Cheverly, Maryland. I would go to the U.S. National Arboretum to explore its bounty of plants and wildlife across 450 acres. Much to my delight no one was there back then, so I had free run to explore. I especially enjoyed climbing Mt. Hamilton by going through the azalea collection. It was wonderful to wander the trails. They were very peaceful. I used to come to the arboretum to relax, wander around, and see the plants. My love of nature is what cultivated my 60-plus year-long connection with the arboretum and its azalea collection. My mother also had a help in my love of gardening. She would have me go into our yard to weed, water, and care for her azaleas. We had different varieties of azaleas planted in our front yard. One of my favorites was, and still is, 'Coral Bells'. My mom showed me how, and when, to prune azaleas—and when to fertilize them. We would use cotton seed meal as fertilizer.

Bob Hobbs, who moved next door in 1965, was also a lover of azaleas. Bob helped teach me about azaleas while we worked on building a house for one of his pipe organs. Later, Bob and I talked about joining the Azalea Society of America (ASA). I joined the Ben Morrison Chapter of the ASA as a life member, just in time to help with the planning and execution of the Ben Morrison-sponsored ASA National Convention to be held in Bowie, MD. Later, I also joined the Northern Virginia Chapter of the ASA as an associate member. I am also a member of the Potomac Valley Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society and the Friends of the National Arboretum (FONA). I've been a member of those organizations and for many very enjoyable years.



Harold Belcher volunteered at the U.S. National Arboretum's azalea collection for 10 years.

After I retired from my government career working for the US Navy Department and the Justice Department, my attention turned back to my gardening hobby and spending time at the arboretum. I volunteered to work in the azalea collection with Barbara Bullock. Barbara was the curator of azaleas at that time. She was very helpful and kind in sharing her knowledge of azaleas and offering suggestions to help volunteers with their gardens. While volunteering, I met and made many wonderful friends. I volunteered for over 10 years and enjoyed every minute of it! I still go back to walk the azalea and other collections—and see some of the folks that I worked with while volunteering.

While a member of the Ben Morrison Chapter, I served four-terms as the president of the Ben Morrison Chapter of the Azalea Society of America (2006-2010). During my tenure, I worked diligently with other stakeholders and ASA members, to ensure the successful preservation of the historic and cherished azaleas on the Glenn Dale Hillside of the Azalea Collection. A large portion of plants there as well as in the Boxwood Collection were slated to be removed—deaccessioned—from the collection along with staff gardener positions due to USNA budget challenges hampering collection maintenance. I'd like to think my efforts, along with Friends of the National Arboretum, and several other organizations, raised awareness and funds helped to preserve some of the most horticulturally valuable and spectacular azalea hybrids developed by the Arboretum's first director Benjamin Morrison.



The deciduous Aromi Hybrid 'Lemonade' in Harold Belcher's home garden.

Rhododendron Borer

By Carol Allen—Germantown, Maryland

I have long been passionate about native plants, native shrubs in particular, and most of all, rhododendron species. My native rhododendron season begins with *Rhododendron periclymenoides*, also known as pinxterbloom. Its graceful pink flowers dominate the local woods in late April and the early emerging swallowtail butterflies find them just as lovely as I do! My season continues with *R. viscosum* and its fragrant white blossoms in mid-May.

The warm-colored (yellow, orange, and red shades) native azaleas continue the show through June and July with *R. calendulaceum*, *R. cumberlandense*, and finishes with *R. prunifolium* in August. *Rhododendron arborescens* and its hybrids add a white, sweet-smelling counterpoint to the above by blooming from mid-June to mid-August.

I have many hybrids of the above species as well. With this concentration of the same kinds of plants in my yard, I have to be vigilant in scouting for their particular pests. The most worrisome for me is the rhododendron borer (*Synanthedon rhododendri*).

The rhododendron borer is a native pest that can be a problem for evergreen rhododendrons, deciduous azaleas, and mountain laurel. *S. rhododendri* is a type of clearwing borer. Clearwing borers are members of the order Lepidoptera (moths and butterflies) and the family Sesiidae (clearwing moths) and include some other nasty pests such as peachtree borer and dogwood borer. These day-flying insects look like wasps so they are difficult to identify as moths to the casual observer.

The rhododendron borer is the smallest of the group being less than a ½" long. Their bodies are a metallic blue-black with three yellow bands on the abdomen and coppery scales on the clear wings. The abdomen sports either a fan (male) or tufted (female) end.

The moths emerge fully mature in mid-May and females usually mate on the first day. The adults only live for a couple of days. Once inseminated, the female seeks a disturbed area on a rhododendron or azalea stem. Usual sites include old borer damaged areas, old pruning scars or where the plant was recently dead-headed.

After hatching, the borer chews an entrance into the heartwood of a stem where it will tunnel and feed until the onset of cold weather. In December, the not-quite-mature larvae ceases feeding and spins a cocoon deep inside the rhododendron branch or trunk. Sometime in March it will resume feeding. In late April to early May, the larvae pupates, then emerges as an adult later in May.



Rhododendron borer photo by Jim Baker, North Carolina State University, Bugwood.org.

The rhododendron borer is almost fully protected during its life cycle by being enclosed in the plant's stem. This enclosed environment makes bio-rational controls difficult. Nurserymen, landscapers, and rhododendron hobbyists can obtain pheromone traps to attract the male moths as they emerge. These traps emit a chemical scent similar enough to the scent of a female moth that the males are fooled and caught. Since the adults have only a few days to mate and lay eggs, these traps pin-point moth emergence so pesticide sprays (usually permethrin) can be applied to the stems and trunks of vulnerable plants.

A non-chemical control, and the one I use, is to closely monitor the new shoots during the summer growing season. As the borer feeds, it causes the young leaves to wilt and the stem to droop or "flag." Cut the shoot off below the wilt point and trace the borer's tunnel down until you see the larvae and destroy.

By reputation, clearwing borers prey on stressed plants. Site your rhododendron species and hybrids where they can get either direct morning sun with afternoon shade, or in an area of high dappled shade. They require acid soil with a high humus content. They do not do well in compacted, heavy soils and do not tolerate water-logged roots. Water during times of drought and keep the root zone cool, moist, and weed-free with 2–3" of an organic mulch. Pine fines or pine bark mulch will do dual duty by maintaining the acidity of the soil.

About the Author

Carol Allen describes herself as a committable plant-a-holic. She has more than 25 years' experience in the horticulture industry, with a special interest in plant pests and diseases; is a Licensed Pesticide Applicator in the state of Maryland; and is an ISA-Certified Arborist.

In Memoriam: Raymond Goza

By Ken Gohring—Marietta, Georgia



Ray Goza and customer at an Azalea Chapter of ARS plant sale.
Photo by Ken Gohring.

Word has been received that Ray Goza, a former lifetime member of the Azalea Society of America and a longtime member of the American Rhododendron Society (ARS) Azalea Chapter member has passed away. In their latter years, Ray and his late wife Ann had moved from Atlanta, Georgia, to Calhoun to be near their daughter. At Calhoun, the Gozas bought a small farm where Ray continued to grow azaleas and rhododendrons. Over the years, Ray has been a past speaker at ASA annual meetings and served the ARS Azalea Chapter well in several leadership positions and as a tireless worker at flower shows, plant sales and field trips.

I first met Ray some time ago at Northlake Mall in east Atlanta. I was shopping at the center when I noticed some people and a lot of attractive plants. I was greeted by Ray and Bill Johnson. The two were working at an ARS Azalea Chapter plant sale at the mall. They gave me information about the American Rhododendron Society and the Azalea Chapter and later I joined the society. I learned that Ray and I both worked for the same company, Southern Railway. He worked at Inman Yard, a large rail humpyard in northwest Atlanta. In addition to other tasks, he worked with the radio equipment that the railroad used in its over the road rail movements. Ray worked 42 years for the railroad.

I became an active chapter member after Avis Aronovitz, former chapter president and gardening author, got me involved in the 2002 national convention. At that convention, one of my responsibilities was work-

ing with Ray, who was responsible for arranging the convention's northside garden trips as well as a trip to Auburn. He was a faithful member. The Gozas attended many ARS and ASA regional and national conventions.

Ray had a plant nursery in which he specialized in azaleas and rhododendrons. He was an authority on plant culture and provided his customers with excellent plants and planting advice. He was also a member of the International Plant Propagators Society.

He was a frequent speaker at gardening-related events throughout the Atlanta area. When Avis wrote her book, *Gardening Around Atlanta*, she involved Ray and another ARS Azalea Chapter member, Louis Short, in writing the section on hybrid rhododendrons. Both Ray and Louis were recognized azalea and rhododendron authorities who did a lot of field work, frequently working together, studying native azaleas in wild areas around Atlanta.

Ray took up aviation after retirement from the railroad and purchased his own plane, which he flew to Alaska with his son on one occasion. He was a ham radio operator and did volunteer work with the Civil Air Patrol. Beekeeping was another hobby he pursued.

His field work with native azaleas led to the discovery of an attractive nativar which he named 'My Choice'. He felt that the plant was worthy of registration but never pursued doing so.



Ray Goza's R. 'My Choice' photo by Joe Coleman.

Fireflare Orange® ‘FireDak’ Mollis Azalea: A Northern Plains Survivor

By Todd West—Fargo, North Dakota

The deciduous azalea cultivar Fireflare Orange® (*Rhododendron* × *kosteranum* ‘FireDak’) was released by North Dakota State University (NDSU) in 2018, following more than four decades of field evaluation in Fargo, North Dakota (USDA Hardiness Zone 4). This single-plant selection originated from a hybrid Mollis azalea seedling population purchased in 1975 from Farmer Seed & Nursery (Faribault, Minnesota). The parentage of the population is unknown¹ and Farmer Seed & Nursery ceased operations in 2022.

Fireflare Orange® represents a unique survivor among numerous azalea species, hybrids, and cultivars evaluated over many decades at NDSU. It is the only azalea to persist and perform reliably under Fargo’s challenging environmental conditions²—cold winters, high-pH silty clay soils (pH 7.8), and periodic moisture stress. Despite these limitations, the plant has demonstrated exceptional vigor, consistent bud set, and winter hardiness comparable to the University of Minnesota’s Northern Lights series (Zones 3b–4). Notably, none of the Northern Lights cultivars have survived long-term in Fargo trials, underscoring the distinct resilience of this selection.

The Mollis Azaleas are hybrids of *Rhododendron molle* ssp. *japonicum* × *R. molle* ssp. *molle*, neither of which are considered hardy in Zone 4. Fireflare Orange® challenges this limitation, combining ornamental merit with adaptability to conditions previously considered unsuitable for azalea cultivation. After 40 years in the landscape, mature plants form dense, compact mounds approximately 1.2 m (4 ft) tall and 1.5 m (5 ft) wide—smaller than any of the orange-flowering cultivars in the Northern Lights series.

Leaves are alternate, simple, and variably oblong-obovate with entire margins. Foliage is pubescent when young, becoming glabrous to sparsely setaceous along the veins beneath. Leaf size ranges from 1.3–11.4 cm in length and 1.3–3.8 cm in width. Fall coloration is consistently ornamental, typically developing yellow-orange to reddish-purple tones by October in Fargo. (See Figure 2.)

Flowering is annual, although flower abundance varies with the previous year’s growth and environmental conditions, including soil moisture, fertility, and light exposure. Inflorescences consist of 3–7 florets per



Fig. 1 Azalea Fireflare Orange® in bloom. Photo by Todd West.

bud, each averaging 6.3 cm (2.5 in) in diameter. The brilliant fire-orange color is striking and has proven to be a distinctive ornamental feature in early to mid-spring. (See figure 1.) Optimal growth occurs under partial shade (25–50%). Plants show no chlorosis symptoms, even in alkaline soils.

So far we have not seen any issues with powdery mildew. Plants were planted in a landscape where deer issues are quite prevalent and did not have problems, but that doesn’t mean that they won’t. We haven’t seen lace bugs or petal blight issues in Fargo, so don’t know how it would do, but that might mean we just don’t have the insects or pathogen here.

Propagation of Fireflare Orange® is achieved via tissue culture or softwood cuttings. Commercial availability includes tissue culture liners from Mountain Shadow Nursery (Vancouver, WA) and Youngplants Canada (Vineland Station, ON), and potted plants from Pacific Crest Ornamentals, LLC (Woodburn, OR).

Fireflare Orange® expands the environmental limits traditionally associated with deciduous azaleas, dem-



Fig. 2 Azalea Fireflare Orange® fall foliage. Photo by Todd West.

onstrating reliable performance in cold climates, clay soils, and alkaline conditions. Current breeding efforts at NDSU are utilizing this germplasm to develop new cultivars capable of combining northern hardiness with the vivid floral display and seasonal interest characteristic of the Mollis Group. Breeding outcomes are aimed at developing a new generation of Zone 4-hardy, clay-soil-tolerant, high-pH-resilient deciduous azaleas. Breeding efforts are focusing on other flower colors and a more compact form.

Notes:

1. Seed was not purchased, seedlings were purchased or at least the plants that were purchased were not labeled as any cultivar back in 1975. So we list as the original as unknown seedlings. Parentage is unknown because they were bought from a local greenhouse that is no longer in business. Nothing is known about the parents, there are no records from the business that they plants were purchased from.
2. 'FireDak' has not been grown in areas that are more acidic or in a warmer environment. We have no data on heat, humidity or acidic soil environments. The focus with this plant was being able to grow it in a 3b/4a alkaline soil environment.

About the Author:

Dr. Todd West is Professor of Horticulture and Director of the Woody Plant Improvement Program at North Dakota State University, Fargo. His research focuses on the evaluation, selection, and introduction of cold-hardy woody landscape plants for the Northern Great Plains.

Fall Means it's Renewal Time!

By Pat Insley, Membership Administrator

The holiday season is coming up fast and before you get swamped, please remember that it's also time to renew your Azalea Society of America annual membership for 2026. You can check your member page on the ASA website (<https://azaleas.org/>) to see if you set up a subscription or if you pay annually. You will also be getting an email reminder for our members that renew online.

If you have a subscription set up, then you don't have to worry about taking any action. Your membership will renew automatically. If you pay annually—now is the time to renew. Dues will remain at \$30 per year. As a reminder, when you login to the ASA website, go to the JOIN/RENEW menu item. Your account information is automatically linked so you can manually renew from this screen. If you've forgotten about an existing subscription, you will get a warning note on the screen, so you won't be duplicating a membership.

All purchases through our website automatically include a processing fee based on the amount of the purchase. This fee covers the costs of the credit card processing fee which ASA is charged for each transaction. You can choose not to pay this small processing fee, but paying it helps support ASA's continued operations.

Please let me know if your email has changed so that I can make sure we are communicating. My contact information is listed below. If you prefer to renew by mailing in a printed renewal form, one may be found in the envelope with this issue of *The Azalean*. You can also print a form from the ASA website.

If you would prefer to not renew online, but would like to use a credit or debit card, you can contact me directly and I can process your payment information.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about your membership and thank you again for your continuing participation in the Azalea Society of America.

My contact information is: Pat Insley, Membership Administrator, Azalea Society of America, 13035 Farthingale Dr., Herndon, VA 20171, 703-597-7539, membership@azaleas.org.

Society Officer Candidates

Our society depends on the efforts of volunteers to plan and conduct our programs. As with many organizations, it is sometimes difficult to find members who are willing to volunteer their services. We certainly appreciate those who step forward to serve or otherwise volunteer their time and effort. We hope that more of our members will step forward to serve in volunteer positions both at the chapter and national level.

~ Charlie Andrews, Nomination Committee Chair

Paul Beck—Treasurer

Paul Beck has been a member of Northern Virginia Chapter since 1983. Paul has been very active in that chapter since 2010, as treasurer, webmaster, and developer of the chapter's website. He has also been treasurer and co-webmaster of the ASA since 2014. He developed the ASA online membership database, the searchable azalea information repository, the online repository for *The Azalean*.



He has automated the Northern Virginia chapter plant sales and annual auctions with a barcoding sales and inventory control system. In addition, Paul automated the 2016 ASA Williamsburg joint convention plant sale, the 2018 ASA Arkansas plant sale, and the 2023 ASA Atlanta plant sale. He also created a flexible convention registration system for the ASA website.

Paul retired from the US Air Force in 1984 after 20 years of service and then retired again in 2012 from his second career in the software development industry. Paul and his wife, Carolyn, have been married for 60 years, and they have two children and three grandchildren. He enjoys building and flying remotely controlled model airplanes. Paul holds a PhD in Operations Research and Statistics.

Sarah Brecher—Director 2026-28

Sarah Brecher is the Special Projects Horticulturist at Bellingrath Gardens and Home in Theodore, Alabama, where she leads initiatives to revitalize Core Plant Collections, most notably azaleas and camellias. The azalea collection at Bellingrath is currently represented by a few dozen hybrid evergreen groups, though the gardens are diversifying the palette to include species and deciduous selections. Sarah has a significant role in this effort.



In her revitalizing efforts at Bellingrath, to date she has worked mostly with evergreen taxa. Sarah is particularly interested in trialing species for the Gulf Coast region as well as showcasing historical varieties typical of the Bellingrath's time period. Sarah is also involved in the ASA Legacy Project, planning for a Bowie Mills Hybrids Legacy Garden. She wants to contribute more to ASA and promote azaleas.

Among azaleas, one of her current favorites is the North Tisbury cultivar *Rhododendron* 'Fuzzy,' a cross between *R. nakaharae* and most likely *R. oldhamii*. It has an attractive fuzzy texture and low, creeping habit.

A graduate of Texas A&M University, Sarah has spent four years at Bellingrath cultivating her love of plants and people into purposeful work. With a background in carnivorous plants, orchid, fern production, she brings curiosity for plant diversity and form to all she does. She also enjoys art and music and finds inspiration in the ways creativity and horticulture intertwine. She believes gardens are living works of art that speak through color, texture, and rhythm, connecting people through beauty, memory, and care.



Lafayette Historic Azalea Trail



<https://www.lafayettegardenclub.org/>
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Carson Ellis—Director 2026-28

Carson Ellis is the Curator of the North Carolina Arboretum's Native Azalea Collection and has been a member of the Azalea Society of America since 2022.

As an undergraduate student at Mount Holyoke College, she initially studied art history and studio art but changed her major to environmental science after taking a hiatus to work on farms in Ireland and Nicaragua. Long days harvesting cider apples in the courtyard of a 13th-century monastery and hunting orchids in misty rainforests confirmed that she loved working outdoors and wanted to study plants. In 2013, she fell in love with public garden horticulture as an Olmsted Fellow at the North Carolina Arboretum. Later, she continued her work as a horticulturist with the Highlands Biological Research Station, Memphis Botanic Garden, Tennessee Plant Conservation Alliance, and Living Roofs Inc.

While her curiosity about plants has led her to many fields, forests, and even rooftops, she has always felt most passionate about native plants. Through a collaboration with the Tennessee Plant Conservation Alliance in 2018 to grow a rare sunflower, *Helianthus verticillatus*, Carson became interested in using her skills in horticulture as a tool for native plant conservation. To deepen her knowledge about botany and develop skills in scientific research, she enrolled in graduate school and, in 2022, completed her M.S. Biology at Western Carolina University, where she researched the pollination networks of rock outcrop plant communities.

Today, as the Curator of the NC Arboretum's Native Azalea Collection, Carson lives in her hometown, Asheville, NC, and is thrilled to have the opportunity to leverage both her background in public garden horticulture and plant conservation to steward this special landscape and plant collection. Through this work, she has been grateful to connect with the passion and expertise of the ASA and is excited



by the many beautiful places, both cultivated and wild, that native azaleas have taken her.

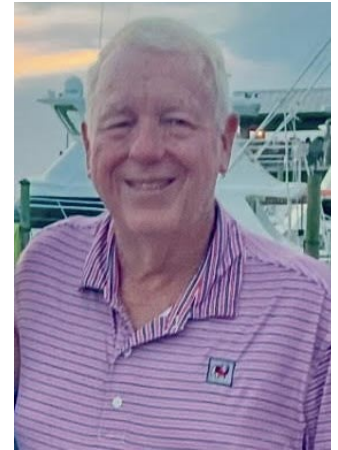
Steve Yeatts--Director 2026-28

Steve's interest in native azaleas began in April 1983, when his mother took him around her property in Oconee County, Georgia, to see if there were any native plants that he would be interested in transplanting to his new yard in Athens, Georgia. He happened to see a *Rhododendron canescens* blooming and asked her what it was. She told him it was a wild honeysuckle bush and that she had seen lots of pink- and yellow-blooming ones when she was growing up in DeFuniak Springs, Florida. He dug a few of them and some mountain laurel from his mother's property and moved them to his yard. He decided to walk through the property again a few weeks later. While walking along the creek, that bordered her property, He saw a white-blooming wild honeysuckle bush that turned out to be *R. arborescens*. From there, he was off and running.

He did some research and discovered Transplant Nursery was nearby and decided to pay them a visit. Mary Beasley filled his ears full of high-level information regarding all the species that could be found in Georgia, and he was completely hooked!

Steve joined the Azalea Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society and in 1991 joined the Azalea Society. By meeting people such as Charles Hunter and Bob Stevens, he began to travel extensively on field trips. He has travelled tens of thousands of miles and seen thousands of each species of native azalea in this country. Steve has been retired since 2017 and has been devoting most of his time to discovering new native plants.

Steve promotes native azaleas and is working with the 2026 ASA convention committee.



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Chapter News

Alabamense Chapter

John Torbert

The Alabamense Chapter held its Annual Meeting via Zoom on October 16. We plan to hold our third year of Azalea 101 Workshops in spring 2026. The first workshop will be held in Fairhope, AL, at a to-be-determined location during the second or third week of March, and the second workshop will be held at the Huntsville Botanical Gardens on May 5, on the day before the 2026 Master Gardeners Convention. In 2027, we intend to hold an Azalea 101 Workshop in Birmingham as a prelude to the 2027 Master Gardeners State Convention. The meeting concluded with a very fine presentation by President Shane Harris on how to propagate azalea from seed.



Arkansas Chapter

Terri Waterman

On October 18, the Arkansas Chapter met for a morning of fun, fellowship, and food. It was a great Fall meeting at Chapter President Ronnie Palmer's house, which also happens to be the home of Azalea Hill Nursery. The weather was perfect and it's always a good day when you can spend it surrounded by azaleas, rhododendrons, and an assortment of perennial companion plantings. We had members attend from all over Arkansas, as well as a member who always makes it down from south Missouri. Sixteen members attended the meeting.

Leslie and David Nanney of Virginia sent cuttings of several varieties of Holly Springs azaleas that Ronnie wants to pass along to Chapter members next year, helping to pass along the legacy of Holly Springs Hybrids and keep them growing in our yards. He asked me to do a presentation on the Holly Springs Azalea Hybrids. I used the wonderful information from the Azalea Society of America's website, www.azaleas.org, to build the program, talking about the history behind their hybridization as well showing pictures and details of many of the almost 100 varieties that were made available. Holly Springs Hybrids are known for their large, often multicolored blooms, dwarf to mid-size growth habit and good cold hardiness. Most varieties are relatively small, mid- to late-blooming evergreen azaleas. Members were delighted with the variety of colors available, including bicolor and variable colorations of striping, sanding, and selfs. The Holly Springs Hybrids include about every azalea form and shape, with singles, doubles, hose-in-hose, and rounded to ruffled edges.

At the end of the program everyone spent time socializing and eating potluck. As everyone left, they were able to browse and buy many potted azaleas that were available. Now to get them home and in the ground.



Kathy Jentz gives a presentation on groundcovers for azaleas and rhododendron. Photo by R. Bauer.

Northern Virginia Chapter

Rick Bauer, Corresponding Secretary

The chapter continues to maintain and expand the

Welcome New Members!

The Alabamense Chapter welcomes:

- Laurens Cotten, Birmingham, AL
- Whit Kirkland, Byron, GA
- Fred Schlish, Auburn, AL
- Donald & Kimberly Whiddon, Semmes, AL

The Ben Morrison Chapter welcomes:

- Madeleine Castro, Boyds, MD

The Central Carolinas Chapter welcomes:

- Gerri Register, Loris, SC

The Northern Virginia Chapter welcomes:

- Tri Dang, Washington, DC
- Nell Strachan, Towson, MD

The Rev John Drayton Chapter welcomes:

- Janet Armstrong, Summerville, SC
- Rachel Lindsay, Summerville, SC
- Annabeth Parker, Charleston, SC
- Cary Parker, Charleston, SC
- Carol Taylor, Charleston, SC
- Sally Whitlock, Summerville, SC



GARDENDC
A PODCAST HOSTED BY KATHY JENTZ,
EDITOR OF WASHINGTON GARDENER MAGAZINE

The **GardenDC Podcast** is all about gardening in the Mid-Atlantic United States and beyond. The program is hosted by Kathy Jentz, editor of *The Azalean*, and features guest experts in local and national horticulture. The latest episodes include interviews with experts on Urban Trees, Edible Native Plants, and Soil Care Basics.

You can listen for FREE online on YouTube, at <https://washingtongardener.blogspot.com/>, or on any podcast app such as Spotify, Apple, etc.

Klimavicz Legacy Garden at Meadowlark Botanical Gardens in Vienna, VA. The chapter held a workday at Meadowlark on October 21. David Meadows, Dave Nanney, Ralph Habbegger, Hiep Pham, and Paul and Carolyn Beck weeded, inserted Repellex tablets (deer deterrent) around each azalea, and spread mulch on the existing bed.

On November 2, we held a chapter meeting with speaker Kathy Jentz giving an outstanding presentation on “Groundcovers for Azaleas and Rhododendron.” A large selection of groundcover plants was available for sale after the presentation, and Kathy sold and autographed copies of her book, *Groundcover Revolution*. We had a great turnout, including guests from other local garden clubs.

Our final event for the year is our Holiday Social/Annual meeting, which we’ll hold on December 7. In addition to our potluck dinner, we’ll be voting on our budget and officers for 2026 and chapter donations for 2025.



Louisiana Chapter

Denise Lanclos, Secretary

We are revitalizing the Blue Star Memorial Highway Marker for an upcoming Veteran’s Day Ceremony. Our Lafayette Garden Club (promoter of the Lafayette Historic Azalea Trail) collaborated with Lafayette Travel, the Home Depot Foundation, and the Lafayette Sheriff’s department provided several inmates and deputies to volunteer to help the garden club members do the project.

I wrote for a Home Depot Foundation grant, and we were awarded \$1,000 worth of azalea, camellia, mum plants, mulch, soil, and fertilizer.

The marker is located in the gateway at our visitor center, which is also promoted as the “starting point” for the azalea trail.

We planted several azaleas in this project; Encore® Autumn Bonfire®, Encore® Autumn Lily®, and ‘Red Ruffles’ azaleas.

Remembering the Past: Our First Ten Years

The Azalea Society of America

By Aaron Cook—Hendersonville, North Carolina

This is a brief compilation of our history viewed through the lens of our annual meetings and conventions. This article is an edited compilation of pieces written primarily by Charles Evens. The notable exception is the part about the ninth meeting held in the Pacific Northwest. This part was originally written by Otto E. Henrickson, Northwest Chapter President.

OUR BEGINNING

On Friday, December 9, 1977, a small group of people met at Brookside Gardens in Wheaton, MD, for the purpose of forming an azalea society. By 1978, the society was well organized with by-laws, national officers, and a board of governors (now known as the board of directors). The first public meeting was held in Silver Spring, Maryland, with 43 of the 100 society members present. In 1979, the first annual meeting was held at the U.S. National Arboretum in Washington, DC, with 75 of the Society's 140 members present.

Nathan Fitts, a founding member of the society and member of the first board of governors, served as legal counsel and briefly became the editor of the newsletter of the Azalea Society of America.

FIRST ASA ANNUAL MEETING ~ 1979

The Azalea Society of America's first annual meeting was held March 25, 1979, in the main auditorium of the National Arboretum, Washington, DC. At the business session, the members elected a slate of officers and voted to adopt the by-laws of the Society as presented at the October 28, 1978, meeting.

The first officers and board members were: Dr. Neil Campbell (board member), Emile Deckert (president, see figure 1), Nathan Fitts (legal counsel), Judith Groomes (membership chairwomen), George Harding (board member), Alice Holland (recording secretary), William Parsons (treasurer), Marie Thais Spencer (board member), Nancy Swell (board member), and Frank White (vice president).

Emile Deckert requested that he not be considered for a second term but agreed to serve as a member of the Board. Following the business meeting, Frank White presented a talk and conducted a discussion with the audience on practical aspects of successful azalea gardening.

SECOND ASA ANNUAL MEETING ~ 1980

There appears to be some confusion about the second annual meeting. It is advertised in Volume 2, Number 2, of the *Azalea Society Newsletter* as the "First Annual Meeting." However, in the July 1980 Special Edition of *The Azalean*, it is referred to as the Second Annual Meeting. It was held at a 4-H Center on May 18th in Chevy Chase, Maryland. During the business meeting, five chapters were chartered. Those five chapters were: Brookside Gardens (the original



Fig. 1 Emile Deckert was a founding member, the first ASA president (1978), and was considered the "Father of the Azalea Collection" at Brookside Gardens in Wheaton, Maryland. While he dabbled in the breeder's art and introduced the Deckert Hybrid Azaleas, he also was interested in hosta and introduced 'Blue Mouse Ears'.

chapter), Richmond (Virginia), Ben Morrison (Maryland), Robert D. Gartrell (New Jersey), and Northern Virginia. After the business meeting, George Ring gave a presentation on the Gable Hybrids.

THIRD ASA ANNUAL MEETING ~ 1981

The third annual meeting was held Saturday, May 2, 1981, at the Nature Center building adjacent to Brookside Gardens in Wheaton, MD. After a short business meeting, including the election of new Governors, Mr. Donald Hager, a nurseryman specializing in azaleas, presented a talk on "Propagation of Azaleas." By this meeting, the Society had expanded by 106 more members and two more chapters. The two new chapters were both in the south. The Louisiana Chapter, located in Franklinton, Louisiana, and the Ralph W. Pennington Chapter, in Anderson, South Carolina.

FOURTH ASA ANNUAL MEETING & CONVENTION ~ 1982

The fourth ASA national meeting and convention was held in Richmond, VA, from April 30 through May. This was the first multi-day convention and set the precedent for all future ASA annual meetings. The convention was a joint effort by the Richmond chapter, ASA, and the Middle Atlantic Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society

(ARS). The program included lectures, a flower show, and a plant sale. This conference also included tours of eight private gardens. It would appear that most of the attendees were housed by ASA and ARS members in their homes.

FIFTH ASA ANNUAL MEETING & CONVENTION ~ 1983

The 1983 national convention and meeting of the ASA was held at the National 4-H Center, Chevy Chase, Maryland, April 29 to May 1. The convention was hosted by the Ben Morrison, Brookside Gardens, and Northern Virginia chapters and featured the Brookside Gardens azalea show and plant sale. Tours were conducted of the McCrillis Gardens (Bethesda, MD), Brookside Gardens (Wheaton, MD), and Frank White's Azalea Acres (see figure 2). There was also a special tour of the Plant Introduction Station of the U.S. Department of Agriculture at Glenn Dale, Maryland, where Ben Morrison developed the Glenn Dale Hybrids. Lectures were presented on azalea hybridizers/hybridization, landscaping and disease control with a keynote address entitled, "Our Beautiful Native Azaleas," given by Martha Prince. Lodging for the weekend was available at the National 4-H Center or with local chapter members. The charter for our ninth chapter, the Mobile Chapter, was presented to its convention delegate.

SIXTH ASA NATIONAL CONVENTION ~ 1984

The Azalea Society of America held its sixth annual meeting and convention on May 11–13, 1984, in Fredericksburg, Virginia. The Richmond Chapter hosted the convention jointly with the Mid-Atlantic chapter of the American Rhododendron Society. Weekend activities included a flower show, garden tours, a plant sale, and speakers. Polly Hill, developer of the North Tisbury azaleas was one of the featured speakers (see figure 3), along with Rosalie Nachman who talked about "Shady Gardens." There was also a lecture by Barry Yinger, horticulturist, and Curator of the Asian Collection at the U.S. National Arboretum. The annual business meeting included elections, and the adoption of amendments to the by-laws. At the conclusion, Chapters were given the opportunity to bid on hosting future ASA conventions.

Beginning with Volume 6, Number 1, in March 1984, under the direction of editor Dr. Charles Evans, *The Azalean* took on a completely new look and design. It became *The Azalean*, the Journal of the Azalea Society of America. A cover was added and beginning with this edition national officers and chapter officers were listed inside the cover. Dr. Evans also began the tradition of publishing a post-convention highlights article.

SEVENTH ASA NATIONAL CONVENTION ~ 1985

The seventh national convention was different in a lot of ways. It appears to be the first with a theme: "Come Alive in 85." It was also the first outside of the general Washington, Maryland, and Virginia area... and the first in the deep south.

The Seventh ASA National Convention was held at the Ramada Inn–Airport in Mobile, Alabama. Co-chaired by



Fig. 2 Frank White was a founding member, the first ASA vice president (1979), the operator of Azalea Acres Nursery in Lanham, Maryland, and a major factor in the promotion of azaleas in the Washington Metropolitan Area for many years.

Pat Ryan and Russell Scott, the event welcomed 110 registrants, each provided with a personalized name badge. The convention coincided with Mobile's annual azalea festival, offering attendees a vibrant display of azaleas despite a recent freeze.

President John Rochester opened the convention by introducing society officers and governors, and reviewing the organization's ongoing growth. Saturday began with a continental breakfast, followed by a tour of Bellingrath Gardens, where attendees viewed thousands of blooming Kurume and Southern Indian azaleas, including notable varieties such as 'Christmas Cheer', 'Hinode-giri', 'Coral Bells', and the "Southern Indian Famous Five."

The group then visited the Mobile Botanical Center for lunch and networking, before touring major commercial nurseries in Semmes, one of the largest azalea production areas in the U.S. The tour included Paul Dodd Nursery, Tom Dodd Nursery, and Blackwell Nursery, each specializing in different aspects of azalea cultivation. Collectively, these nurseries propagate approximately three million cuttings annually and ship plants nationwide.

Saturday evening featured a plant sale, social hour, and the annual convention dinner. Society officers were reelected, and amendments to the by-laws were unanimously approved. Sidney Meadows, manager of Flowerwood Nursery, delivered the keynote address on the development of commercial azalea production in Mobile. The evening concluded with a spirited auction led by Nels Nelson, and the distribution of azalea centerpieces and books on Bellingrath Gardens.

Sunday included a tour of the Mobile Azalea Trail and historic districts guided by Sue Lyons. Highlights included visits to notable gardens and historic homes, with memorable moments such as Ruth Caldwell's piano performance at the Richards-DAR House.

The convention concluded with an invitation to Mary and Russell Scott's home and nursery, where attendees enjoyed refreshments and selected plants from over 500 varieties. The event was marked by excellent organization, engaging activities, and strong fellowship among members.



Fig. 3 Polly Hill was a speaker at the Sixth ASA national meeting in Fredericksburg, Virginia. Not a hybridizer, she obtained seeds from different sources especially *Rhododendron nakaharae* and is specifically noted for her introduction of the North Tisbury Hybrids.

EIGHTH ASA NATIONAL CONVENTION ~ 1986

(Theme: Garden State Party)

One hundred ASA members and their guests gathered in Morristown, New Jersey, from May 16–18, 1986, for the eighth ASA annual meeting and convention. Centered at the Headquarters Plaza Hotel, the convention offered a weekend of lectures, plant sales, garden tours, and informal gatherings. The Friday evening opening ceremonies began with welcoming remarks from Jerry Goodman, president of the Robert Gartrell Chapter. ASA president John Rochester next discussed the continuing spread of ASA conventions from the Middle Atlantic chapters to Alabama, New Jersey, and next to Oregon.

Allan Anderson introduced Dr. Joseph Peterson of Rutgers' University, who spoke on petal blight and other disfiguring diseases of azaleas. After an informal gathering for continental breakfast, members and guests boarded buses for the Leonard J. Buck Garden which is situated about one-half hour west of Morristown in Far Hills, New Jersey. Created in a glacial age valley by Mr. Buck in the first half of the 20th century, this unique rock garden has been administered since 1976 by the Somerset County Park Commission. Under the guidance of landscape designer Zenon Schreiber, a dam was built, paths were laid, and outcroppings were exposed or reconstructed until the valley had been transformed with native and imported plants into an impressive garden.

After the Buck Garden, the buses traveled to the Frelinghuysen Arboretum, which is just minutes from the center of Morristown. Upon arrival at the arboretum, ASA members were treated to a marvelous buffet luncheon prepared and served by members of the Robert Gartrell Chapter on the porch of the Frelinghuysen home. After a leisurely repast in the adjacent formal gardens with their spectacular 'Raccatil' tree peonies in full bloom, the arboretum horticulturists led the members through the various areas of the arboretum which included a number of fully mature rhododendrons as

well as deciduous and evergreen azalea hybrids. The annual business meeting opened with remarks by Jerry Goodman and Mal Clark following which John Rochester presented the Charter to the newly formed Delmarva Chapter. Bob Carlson, the speaker for the evening, was introduced by Mal Clark and Polly Hill. Bob's talk, "Northern Grown Azaleas," was a delightful mixture of his now famous rhymes and a historical commentary describing the development of growing hardy azaleas up north with his wife Jan. He illustrated many of his favorite old and new varieties with slides,

The annual meeting concluded with the unanimous adoption of the proposed changes to the society's by-laws and election of society governors. Ryon Page was introduced as president and Mal Clark as chairman of the Board of Governors for the next year. The final event was presentation by John Rochester of the Society's first Distinguished Achievement Award accompanied by a framed calligraphy certificate to past governor and founding member George W. Harding. The Ninth ASA Convention and Annual Meeting was announced for late April 1987 in Eugene, Oregon.

NINTH ASA NATIONAL CONVENTION 1987

(ASA'S Introduction to the Northwest)

This convention marked several milestones in the ASA. It was the first and only one to be held on the West Coast. It was also the only traveling convention, where the convention moved each day to a new location.

The Northwest Chapter hosted the ninth annual meeting and convention. The first group of about 45 delegates arrived at Nendels Motor Inn in Portland, Oregon, on Monday, April 27, 1987. Chapter President Otto Henrickson made welcoming comments. Eleanor Stubbs introduced the featured speaker, Bob Badger, who gave a talk entitled "In Search of the Yellow Evergreen." Tuesday's tours included Ivan Arneson's and Bill Guttormsen's Nurseries in Canby, and a lunch stop at Stubbs Shrubs in West Linn.

The next stop on the Tuesday tour was the Cecil and Molly Smith Garden. Developed by Mr. and Mrs. Smith, the gardens are now owned and maintained by the Portland Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society.

By early afternoon, the bus arrived at the Valley River Inn in Eugene. Attendance at the evening program at Valley River Inn swelled to nearly 70 delegates as others joined the festivities. The speaker for the evening was Eleanor Stubbs, who outlined the history of the Greenwood azaleas. Her presentation, augmented by slides, revealed the purpose and methods of development of these beautiful and unusual evergreen azaleas.

On Wednesday morning, over 60 delegates boarded two buses for the second tour. The first stop was made at the home and gardens of Mrs. Helen Schroyer, where participants were welcomed and provided refreshments under towering oak trees adjacent to the house. From this patio area, the panorama of her garden was delightful. Several acres in size and intersected by a large stream, the rolling landscape had lawned paths separating the plantings. Fea-

tured in the garden were many varieties of conifers, deciduous trees, lilacs, roses, azaleas, rhododendrons, fuchsias, bulbs, and numerous other plantings.

The next tour stop was at Hass Nursery. The setting with rolling hills, tall Douglas firs, wild ducks on the pond, and a creek was a perfect place to explore. Twenty-acres in size, the nursery featured many large shade houses, smaller greenhouses, and large open spaces to accommodate the azalea and rhododendron plantings. The hospitality of Henrietta and Dallas Hass was a fitting conclusion to the tours in the convention program.

That evening a short business meeting was held in which the new officers for the forthcoming year were announced and introduced. They were Malcolm Clark (president), Bob Hobbs (vice president), Valerie Lorenz (secretary), and Glenn Taylor (treasurer). The speaker for the evening was Britt Smith, who described explorations of the native habitat of *R. occidentale* in the coastal areas of Northern California and Southern Oregon.

After acknowledgements and parting remarks were made, Bill Miller rose to issue a formal invitation for all members to attend the 10th National Meeting of the Society to be held next May in Bethesda, Maryland.

THE REHOBOTH MINI CONVENTION FALL ~ 1987

While not a regular national meeting and convention, it was a two-day program, October 3–4, a mini-convention so to speak, sponsored by the Delmarva and Ben Morrison chapters. It was a unique event as it was held in the fall, when many ASA members who are part of the horticultural industry had more discretionary time. It was very much a social event, but it provided a major opportunity to learn about and acquire new plants. The location was the Rehoboth Art League, Henlopen Acres, Delaware. Opportunities for accommodations and major meals were identified in advance. Speakers included Mal Clark (then ASA president), who discussed the 1983 U.S. National Arboretum Kurumes, and Dr. Arthur Frazer of Columbia Nursery, who spoke on his experiences with the Glenn Dale and Back Acres Hybrids.

TENTH ASA NATIONAL CONVENTION ~ 1988

More than 120 members and guests attended the 1988 ASA convention during May 5–8, 1988, in the Washington, DC area. The activities began on Thursday, May 5, with registration under the direction of Mary Rutley at the Bethesda Hyatt Regency headquarters hotel. The azalea plant sale, headed up by Warren Groomes, and the convention exhibits, arranged for by Bill Miller, opened in the early evening while members were setting up the azalea flower show and receiving early entries. Friday's tours journeyed to Hillwood, the Washington, DC, home of the late Marjorie Maryweather Post, to tour the splendid gardens and view the marvelous collection of Russian art inside Hillwood.

The convention then moved on to the opening of "Azaleas-A Capital Idea," the ninth Brookside Gardens Chapter azalea flower show. The azalea show, chaired by Denise Stelloh, was the largest to date with several hundred azalea specimens and a number of artistic floral designs on

display. Bob Stelloh's entry of 'Refrain' was judged best azalea in the show and Nancy Swell received the Sweepstakes award. Later in the evening after the opening, Fred Galle presented "The Natives are Wild." On Saturday, the tours continued to the home of the late Virginia and Bill McCrillis. The convention next moved to the U.S. National Arboretum (USNA) in Washington, DC. After a welcoming address by Dr. Marc Cathey, then the USNA Director, and a talk by Dr. Frank Santamour, the members proceeded to tour the azalea and rhododendron collections.

On Saturday evening everyone celebrated our tenth anniversary at the host hotel. The evening featured a talk by John L. Creech, a special award to azalea hybridizer Robert Pryor, and presentation of the sixth Frederic P. Lee Commendation for furthering the knowledge and appreciation of azaleas to William C. Miller III. Another highlight of the evening was the presentation of a plant of 'Pocono Pink', grown by Roger Brown to each person in attendance and table prizes of azalea plants provided by Bob Stewart and Pete Vines as well as several specimens of the new azalea variety 'Williamsburg' donated by Sandra McDonald, who developed and introduced the plant. Special awards of appreciation were presented to the founding members of the Society by President Mal Clark. Ruth Amos, Fred Galle, Alice Holland, Bob Stelloh, and Don Voss were elected to two-year terms as Society Governors. Bob Hobbs was elected Society President for 1988–1989. The other officers for 1988–1989 were: Bob Stelloh (vice president), Val Lorenz (secretary), Glenn Taylor (treasurer), and Don Voss (chairman of the board).

Sunday morning, following a breakfast social, the convention visited Brookside Gardens in Wheaton, Maryland, for a tour arranged by Brian Barr. This was followed by a luncheon visit to Oak Hill Nursery, the home of Denise and Bob Stelloh in Darnestown, Maryland. After the visit to Oak Hill, members were given the opportunity to visit other gardens of Brookside Chapter members.

THE REHOBOTH MINI CONVENTION FALL ~ 1988

The Delmarva and Ben Morrison chapters sponsored a second mini-conference on October 8–9, 1988, at the Rehoboth Art League. The formula was the same as the 1987 event. Speakers included Ed Collins on the Dexter Hybrids; a round table with Weldon Delp; Tony Dove, the curator of Londontown Gardens, Weldon Delp again on his experiences with breeding of deciduous azaleas, lepidote rhododendrons and elepidote rhododendrons; and Nels Nelson on his new evergreen azalea introductions (The First State Hybrids).

Part 2 of this series will be in the Spring 2026 *Azalean* and will cover the second decade of the Azalea Society of America. We will cover the rest of the decades throughout each of the 2026 *Azalean* editions to mark the 50th anniversary of the Society in 2027.

About the Author

Aaron Cook is the current president of the Azalea Society of America.

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