

AZALEA DOGWOOD HISTORY

Dothan's historic Azalea Dogwood Festival will be celebrating its 44th anniversary when the azaleas and dogwoods bloom this Spring. The Festival is a celebration of beauty and the arrival of Spring.

This colorful, Springtime tradition began in 1964 under the direction of the Dothan Federation of Garden Clubs. The popularity of the Festival continued to grow in the 70's and soon became a much larger event than the Federation ever imagined. It was then that the City of Dothan proudly adopted this prestigious event.

Sponsored annually by the City of Dothan and the National Peanut Festival, the Festival brings a bit of the Old South to Dothan. Girls, representing county schools, dress in antebellum gowns and grace the lawns along the seven-mile Trail. These Trail Maidens, as they are familiarly called, greet visitors from across the Southeast on a selected Sunday afternoon. Depending on the blooms, the Trail date is usually scheduled between March 15 and April 15.

A ribbon cutting ceremony, featuring Dothan's Mayor and Azalea Dogwood Queens, marks the beginning of the Trail. The Queen and her Court atop their Corvettes driven by a local Corvette Club, then lead the entourage of cars. Azalea Dogwood Trail participants follow direction signs and pink lines painted onto the road. The trail maidens only greet visitors on Festival Sunday from 2-5 p.m. However, the Trail is always marked and available for cars to tour.

The Sunday that is chosen for the Trail also features a "Sunday Afternoon In The Park" at Solomon Park from 2-5 p.m. This afternoon is spent with families enjoying free entertainment and free refreshments.

The Azalea Dogwood Festival encompasses several events including the Azalea Dogwood Pageant held in late February or early March with over 60 girls in grades 6-12 vying for the titles of the Azalea Dogwood Queen, Princess, and Maid of Honor. These girls preside over the Festival as well as represent the City year-round while performing hostess duties for conventions and tour groups.

An Azalea Dogwood Softball Tournament is held each April at Dothan's Westgate Softball Complex. Some 30 teams from the area kick off their season by competing in this tournament.

Also held in conjunction with the Festival is the Azalea Dogwood Soccer Classic for youth ages 18 and younger. This tournament is held in April/May at Dothan's Westgate Soccer Complex.

The success of the Azalea Dogwood Festival is credited to the many citizens who live along the Trail who continually enhance the beauty of their lawns with azaleas and dogwoods. Charles Taylor, the Festival's volunteer Plant and Weather Advisor for 25 years, was instrumental in keeping the Festival alive and well. Following her father's tradition, Mrs. Scott White (Pat) assumed the hostess duties for the Festival at her home at 115 Girard Avenue in 1999 and continued through 2004. This final stop along the Trail which has been referred to as White-Taylor Hall is now under the ownership of Brent and Elizabeth Cook.

