

# Azalea Gardens

## The Fred Sievers Memorial Garden

Larry Miller — Evansville, Indiana

In early February 2005 a group led by Tim Dodd and I formed the Friends of Fred Sievers and began planning an azalea garden in memory of the late garden columnist for the *Evansville Courier and Press*, Fred Sievers. The garden is located along one of the approaches to the city. Within a couple of weeks we had a formal design and budget prepared by local landscape designer Steve Meyerholz, who had been a friend of Fred's. The design, a 180-foot-long series of beds, incorporated Serbian spruce (*Picea omorika*), hollies, and other woody shrubs, plus over 40 of Fred's favorite azaleas, some of which came from Fred's own garden. All of the plant material was donated, and contributions of cash were obtained from such sources as the Evansville Parks Foundation, The Scripps Foundation, The Great Rivers Holly Society, the Tri-State Chapter of the ASA, and numerous individuals, through a solicitation and a series of newspaper stories about the project.

The garden is composed of three island beds right on the intersection of Water Works Road and Veterans Memorial Parkway, in Sunrise Park. Evergreen azaleas include Schroeder hybrids developed by the late Dr. Henry Schroeder, also of Evansville and a friend of Fred Sievers, as well as Kurumes and several Gable, Girard, and Shammarello hybrids. Examples are 'Karen', 'Rosebud', 'Cascade', 'Doctor Henry Schroeder', 'Mrs. Henry Schroeder', 'Herbert', 'Mildred Mae', 'Poukhanense Pink', 'Purple Pride', and 'Purple Splendor'. Deciduous azaleas are represented in the center of each bed by Exbury hybrids 'Gibraltar' and 'Olympic Fire' and by the species *Rhododendron alabamense* and *R. austrinum*. Also planted as features are the bottlebrush buckeye, *Aesculus parviflora* 'Rogers'; the double file viburnum, *Viburnum plicatum tomentosum* 'Shasta'; Golden St. Johnswort, *Hypericum frondosum*; and hollies *Ilex opaca* 'Green Leaf' and *I. verticillata* 'Winter Red'. A yellow-berried *I. opaca* 'Saga Servene' is coming from Jules Klein

in Kentucky for planting this fall. Additional accents include rhododendrons 'English Roseum' and 'Scintillation'; a Japanese Stewartia, *Stewartia pseudocamellia*; and a central feature, the Katsura tree, *Cercidiphyllum japonicum*. Large sandstone ledge rocks add texture and height to the beds. Becky Nellis, who owns a local landscaping firm, has agreed to maintain the garden for its first few years. Additional help is coming from Purdue University Extension horticultural educator for Vanderburgh County Larry Caplan, who is donating detailed metal plant labels to help educate the public as to the varieties incorporated. This task will be completed when the plants are all identified and was sponsored by Keep Evansville Beautiful.

Sievers, an authority on azaleas, had distinguished himself as a reporter on local and state government and courts for 29 years in Evansville. Although he retired in 1980, he began writing a series of gardening columns in 1969 that continued for another 35 years. His last column appeared just two weeks before his death in 2004 at age 82. His first column under the heading "Fred's Gardening Tips" declared that southern Indiana was "An Ideal Place for Green Thumbs." Other titles included "Flowering Trees Enhance Grounds," "Azaleas Require Protected Site," and "Rhododendrons Require Protection." He promoted diversity in "Lawn Problems? Cover 'em Up" in which he recommended six well-adapted groundcovers. His own garden on Caranza Avenue was a veritable arboretum of diverse plants.

He was a member of the Holly Society of America (Great Rivers Chapter), the Azalea Society of America (Tri-State Chapter), the Southwestern Indiana Master Gardeners Association, Willard Library Park Committee, and Friends of Willard Library. Among many professional journalism awards, Sievers also received the Joseph C. McDaniel Award from the Holly Society of America for



The garden as planned for the dedication June 6, 2005. The yellow-blooming shrub (left) is a *Kerria japonica*, center is *R. 'Scintillation'*, and right is a Siberian spruce. (Photo by Larry Miller)



June 6, 2005, dedication of the Fred Sievers Memorial Garden. Larry Miller presided over the ceremony. (Photos by Jim Michels, Evansville Courier & Press Internet Director and member of the Sievers Garden Committee.)

“Outstanding contributions and dedicated service to the Great Rivers Chapter.”

By the beginning of May the Friends group had raised almost \$20,000 in donations of cash, plants, irrigation materials, and labor, and the garden was installed. The garden was dedicated on June 6, just one year from the date of Sievers’ death.

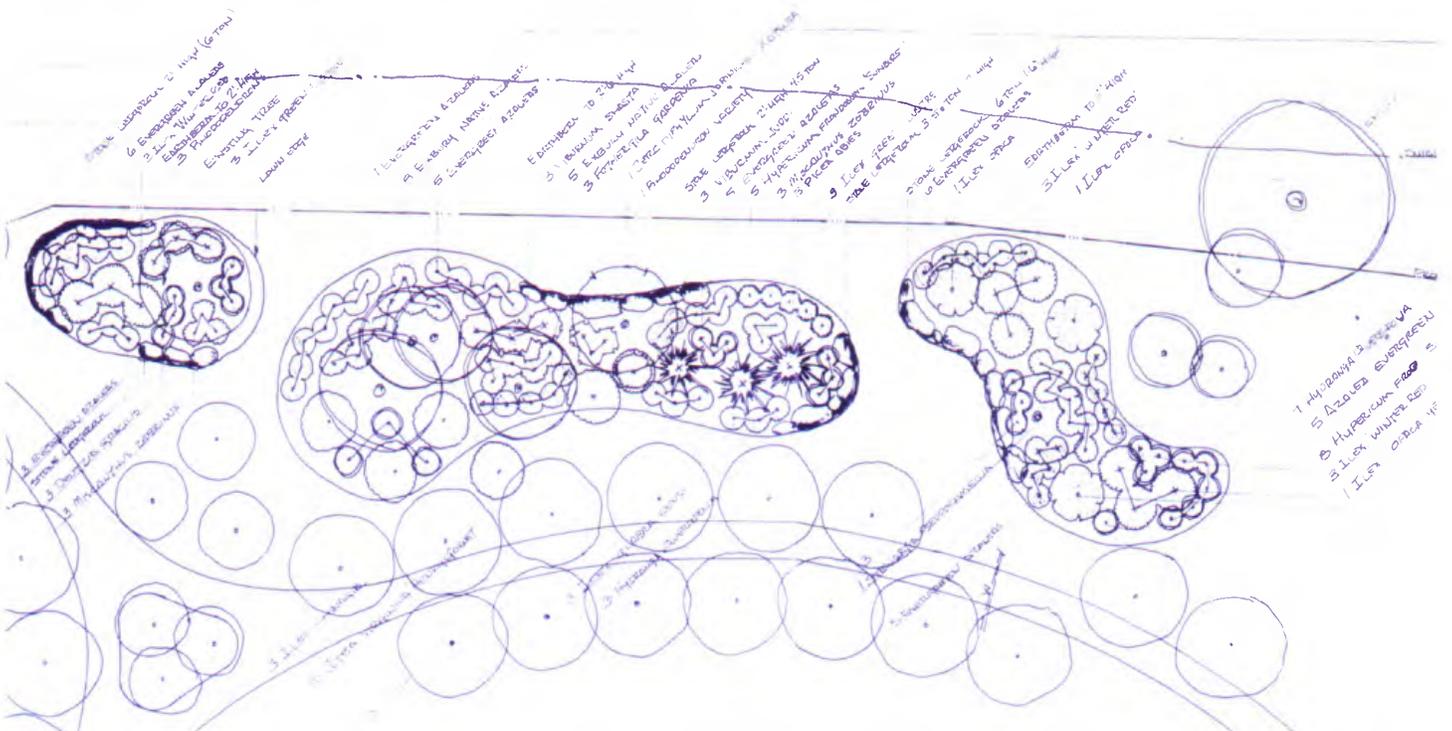
In his proposals to the Evansville Parks Board, the Tree Board, and the Keep Evansville Beautiful Board, project coordinator Tim Dodd indicated that an ultimate goal of the group was to achieve Azalea City of America designation from the Azalea Society of America. This project came together so smoothly, I still can’t believe it. It is one

of the most satisfying community projects I’ve ever worked on.

*Larry Miller is the newly elected president of the Tri-State Chapter of the ASA. When not gardening he is president of Miller Block and Brick Company in Evansville as well as an accordion player, singer/guitarist, and baritone with the Rhein Valley Brass German Band.*

#### Acknowledgments

Material from Jim Allen and Steve Meyerholz was incorporated into this article. Special thanks to Kenneth Brown, who not only was the procurement coordinator for the project, but who also helped with plant names for this article.



Fred Sievers Memorial Garden Plan developed by Steve Meyerholz of Landscape Design Associates of Evansville. This plan was used in convincing Keep Evansville Beautiful to allow the Friends of Fred Sievers to obtain an “Adopt-a-Spot” designation so the garden could actually be planted. The project also had to be approved by the Evansville Parks Board and the Evansville City Commission. These approvals required a landscape plan, budget, and plan for garden maintenance.

(Plan used here by permission of Steve Meyerholz)