The Legacy Project Update

By Richard Bauer—Yorktown, Virginia

Those of us in the Azalea Society of America (ASA) have a great appreciation for the beauty and variety of azaleas. While some are species, the vast majority of azaleas are hybrids, hybridized in the last century. As of this writing, in the ASA plant database, we currently have over 10,953 different varieties and 567 different hybrid groups. Some of these have been partially documented in books such as Fred Galle's *Azaleas*, while others have little to no coverage. Of even greater concern is that many of the varieties no longer exist, or exist in collections of which we are unaware, and may be on the road to extinction.

The question then becomes, is this an issue we should be concerned about, and if so, what should be done and who should do it? This question has been posed by others and efforts to address it have been initiated by a number of folks and organizations, both internal and external to the society. The Northern Virginia Chapter looked at the situation and brought together a multi-faceted program to address the issue. This program, the Legacy Project, brought together different initiatives under a single umbrella which included collection and recording of information on the various hybrids, identifying and propagating true copies of the hybrids, educating the public on the various beautiful hybrid varieties which exist, and introducing the hybrids to the public through plant sales and introduction of the hybrids to public and private gardens.

An initial article on the Legacy Project was in the 2013 Winter issue of *The Azalean*. At that time there were four hybrid groups in the project and it was managed solely within the Northern Virginia Chapter. Since that time, the ASA Board of Directors approved elevating the project to the national level at the 2017 Hammond Convention. The ASA website, which has undergone an incredible makeover, now features the project on its homepage. Steps are being taken to actively encourage public gardens to include these hybrids in their collections. Of greatest interest is the growth in the scope and participation level. The project currently has 14 hybrid groups sponsored by members in three society

▼ Photo 1—Klimavicz Hybrid 'Brenda Marie'

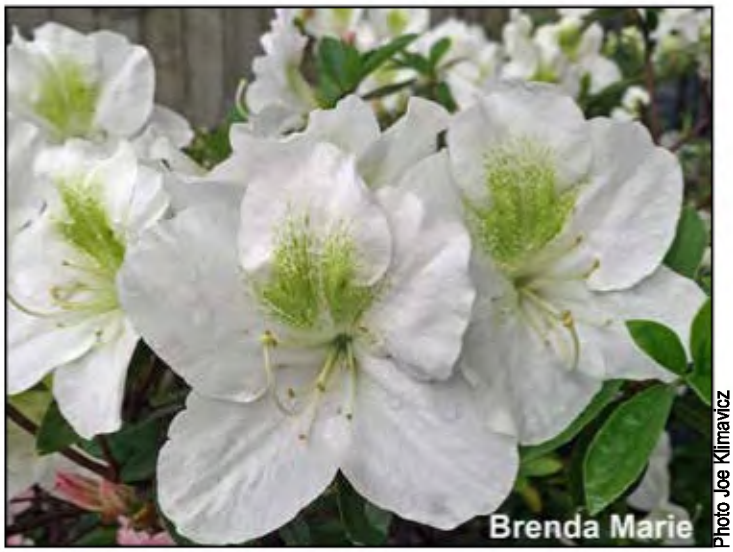


Photo Joe Klimavicz

Table 1: Current Legacy Leads

Hybrid Group	Legacy Lead	Chapter
Aromi	Sherrie Randall	Texas
Bowie Mill	Robert Thau	Texas
Glenn Dale	Ronnie Palmer	Northern Virginia
Harris	Robert Thau	Texas
Holly Springs	David Nanney	Northern Virginia
Huang	Ronnie Palmer	Northern Virginia
Klimavicz	Carolyn Beck	Northern Virginia
Linwood	Ronnie Palmer	Northern Virginia
Marshy Point	Donald Hyatt	Northern Virginia
McDonald	Rick Bauer	Northern Virginia
Sommerville	Ronnie Palmer	Northern Virginia
Stewart	Carolyn Beck	Northern Virginia
Strickland	Kevin McCorkle	Central Carolinas
Varnadoe	Kevin McCorkle	Central Carolinas

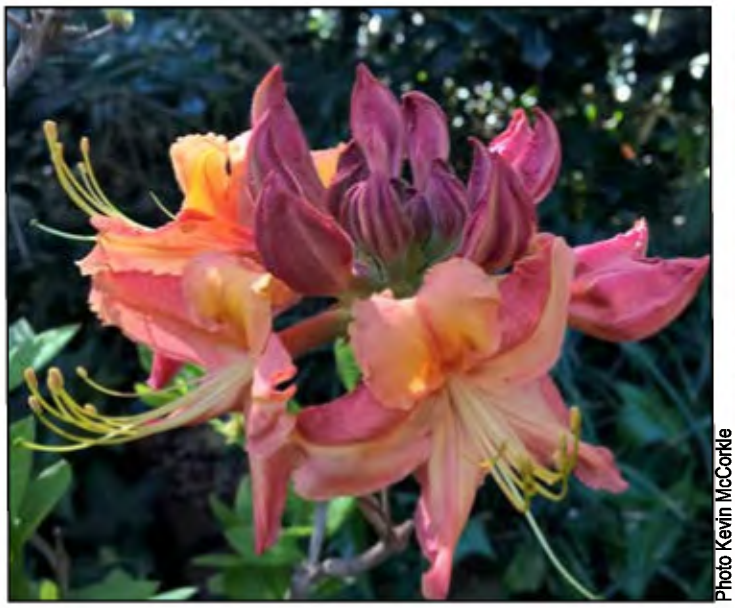


Photo Kevin McCorkle

▲ Photo 2—Strickland Hybrid 'Jenny Maphis'

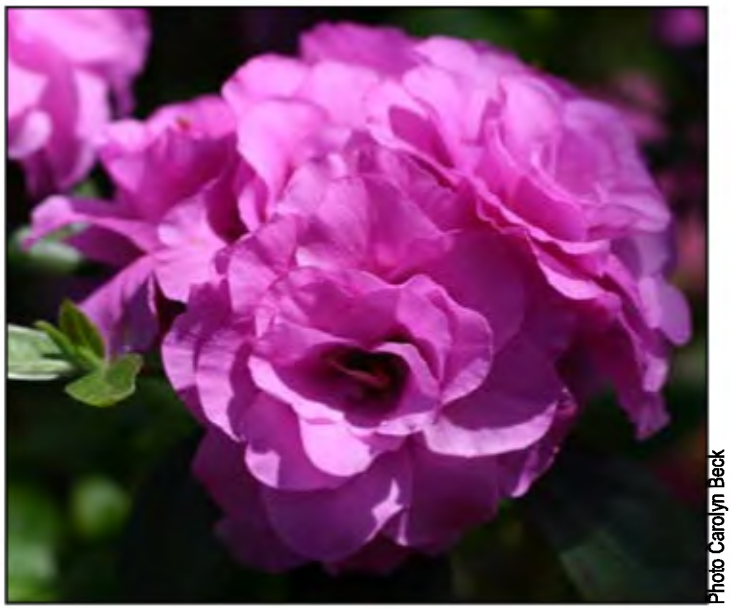


Photo Carolyn Beck

▲ Photo 4—Aromi Hybrid 'Amelia Rose'

▼ Photo 3—Strickland Hybrid 'Roberta Hardison'

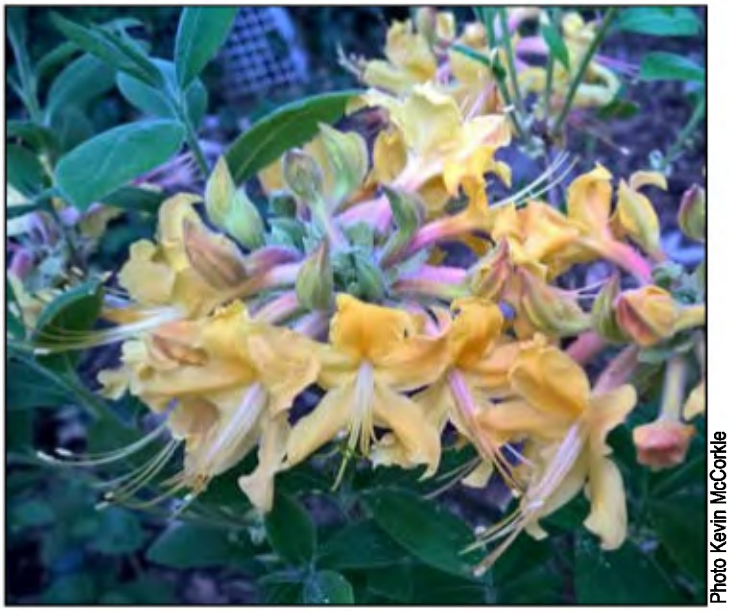


Photo Kevin McCorkle

chapters and eight different legacy leads as shown in Table 1.

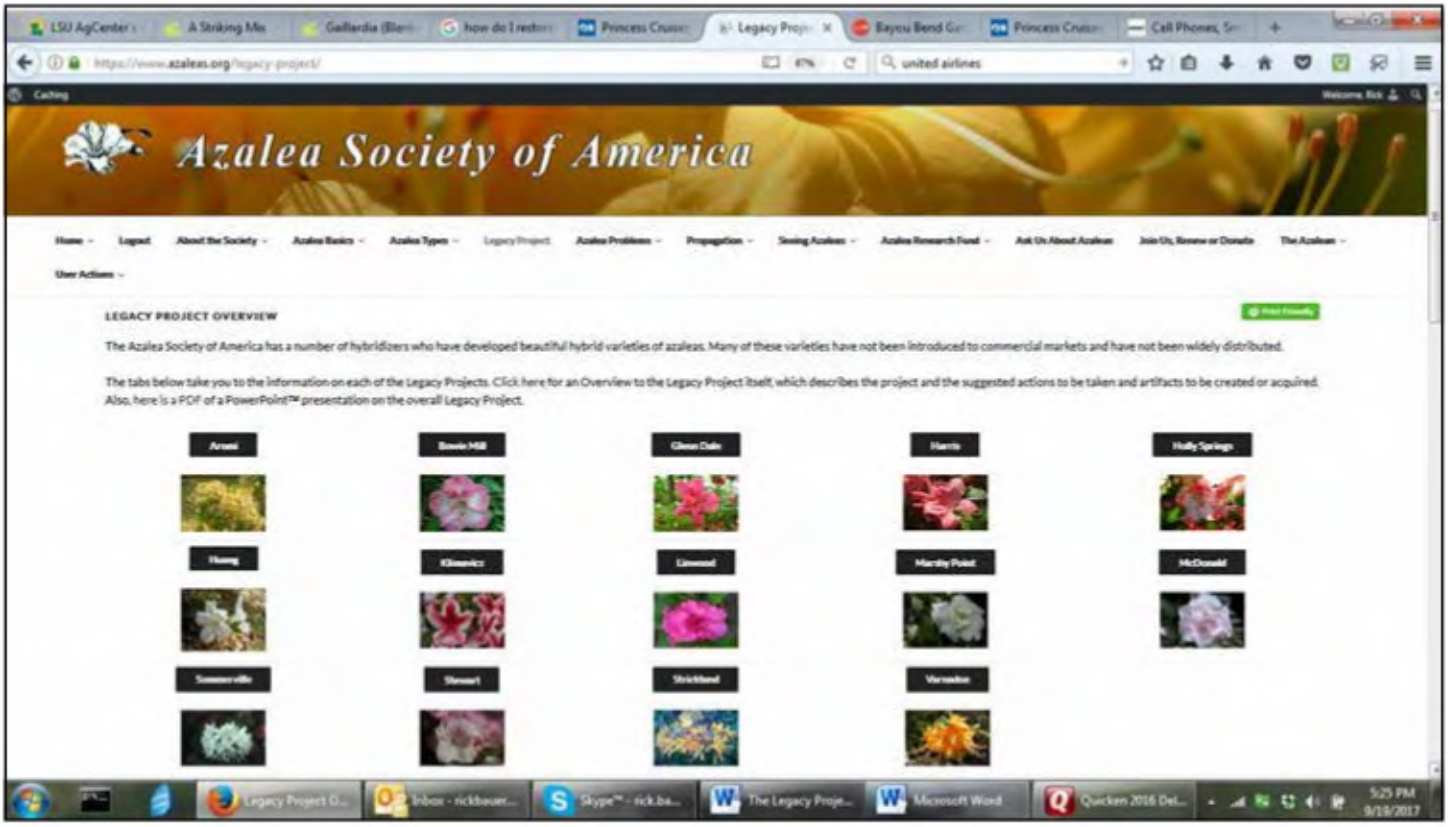
Obviously there has been considerable activity since the original article on this project. The Northern Virginia Chapter continues to propagate and sell legacy hybrids at their plant sales and auctions. We have presentations at chapter meetings on the legacy hybrids as well as give presentations to other chapters and plant societies on legacy hybrids and the Legacy Project. We continue to gather photos and other artifacts associated with the hybrid groups for loading onto the Legacy Project website. We are currently in discussion with Meadowlark Gardens in McLean, Virginia, to establish a Legacy Garden with Klimavicz Hybrids (see Photo 1). Chapter members Roy and Elizabeth Cosby have been active planting legacy hybrids in their garden (now named the Lewis Ginter Nature Reserve), which they have given to Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens in Richmond, Virginia. We are working with former ASA President Aaron Cook to establish Stewart and Klimavicz Legacy Gardens on the campus of Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute in Hudson, North Carolina. We have also entered into discussions with other public gardens for the purpose of establishing legacy gardens.

Kevin McCorkle from the Central Carolinas Chapter and others are actively involved in finding and propagating Strickland azaleas, many through using tissue culture (see Photos 2, 3.) Their efforts took on additional urgency when they discovered that many of the original stock plants are in rapid decline due to age and natural attrition. In working on the Strickland azaleas, Kevin happened upon the Varnadoe Hybrids. He has been working with Aaron Varnadoe's son David, whose house is on his father's land where the original hybridizing was done. David is excited about working with Kevin to identify, document, and propagate his father's cultivars (over 50, with around 12 having been named and only one currently in the trade).

Sherrie Randall from the Texas Chapter, with considerable assistance from Maarten van der Giessen, has taken the lead on the Aromi Hybrids by updating the Aromi Legacy webpage with photos, parentage and other documentation (see Photo 4). Also offering to assist is Amanda Wilkins of the Mobile Botanical Garden who will be providing cuttings for propagation of the hybrids. The Mobile Botanical Garden is home to a large number of Aromi Hybrids and will likely become an Aromi Legacy Garden.

Robert Thau has signed on to be the legacy lead on the Harris and Bowie Mill azaleas. He is working with other society members who are knowledgeable about these varieties to capture and load documentation on the Legacy Project website. Additionally, he is actively propagating the varieties and actively marketing them as well as other azalea varieties to other garden clubs in southeastern Texas.

The Legacy Project can be accessed on the ASA website by selecting "Legacy Project" from the menu at the top of



▲ Photo 5–Legacy Project Screen Shot from ASA website.

the page. You will then be shown a page containing all of the current Legacy Hybrid groups (see Photo 5).

The focal point of any legacy hybrid group is the legacy lead. This individual coordinates all of the activities associated with promoting and retaining the hybrid group. He/she is the gate keeper for hybrid information entered on the ASA website. The concept is to have a team working on maintaining the legacy of the specific hybrid groups. For example, members proficient in PowerPoint, and comfortable giving presentations, might prepare and present programs on the hybridizer and hybrid group (or multiple groups). Others who may be more interested in actual plant propagation might root cuttings and raise them for sale. The key is to tap into the various interests and skills of our members to promote the goals of the project. Future enhancements, dependent upon interest and skill set, could be to prepare presentations on the hybrid groups and film them for uploading to YouTube.

The full scope of Legacy Project activities is a suggested goal; however, any actions taken to further the legacy of a hybrid group are beneficial to the society and azaleas. One statement I frequently use is "Don't let what you can't do keep you from doing what you can."

While an interested member may become a legacy lead, chapters should consider supporting the efforts of their member legacy leads. The actions taken in the Legacy Project are supportive of the objectives and goals of the society, including, "The Society shall promote understanding and skills in the classification, hybridization, propagation, and culture of azaleas among all interested people." Sponsoring hybrid groups can also provide additional structure and purpose to chapter programs.

I'm assuming that most of us joined the society because of our love of azaleas. Active participation in the Legacy Project, in any role, will help promote and maintain our numerous azalea varieties for future generations. I encourage you to become involved. More information is available online at https://www.azaleas.org/legacy-project/.

Richard Bauer was elected ASA President in 2017. He and his wife Susan have been members of Northern Virginia Chapter since 2002. Rick served as the chapter vice president of the Northern Virginia Chapter for four years, chapter president for five years, and as an ASA director for two years. He was co-chair of the 2016 ASA/ARS Convention in Williamsburg, Virginia, and was a member of the team which digitized *The Azalean*. He retired from the US Army in 1994 after 20 years of active service and retired in 2011 from Science Applications International Corporation, where he helped develop software applications for US Army customers.