Lafayette's revitalized Historic Azalea Trail blooms anew, to delight of visitors

BY HOLLY DUCHMANN
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Bicycles, hot rods and classic cars cruised down old streets of Lafayette lined with blooming azaleas on Saturday afternoon to officially mark the revitalization of the Historic Azalea Trail. Once considered a top tourist destination in the South, the 22-mile, self-guided azalea trail was started in the 1930s by the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce. It stretches from the north side of Lafayette to past South College Road. At one point, Southern Living magazine name the azalea trail one of the top 20 attractions in the South. But sometime in the '80s, the path stopped being promoted and eventually was largely forgotten.

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Scenic Lafayette, a community beautification group founded in 2014, took over responsibility for promoting the trail and set about revitalizing the forgotten treasure.

On Saturday, a classic car caravan drove the 22-mile azalea path to pay homage to the decades of driving tours that proved a treat for so many visitors in the past.

"Some of the places were not as grown as they need to be, but some places were gorgeous," said Susan Slovacek, of Broussard, who rode in the caravan with her husband, Andy.

"And it wasn’t only the flowers that were beautiful but the homes were as well," she said.

Susan Fisher, who promoted the caravan for Scenic Lafayette, said the azalea trail is an amazing tourist attraction.

"It drives a lot of tourism dollars down where we desperately need it right now, with the downturn of our economy and the oil industry," Fisher said.

Fisher also was the chairwoman of the Lafayette’s Jaycees, the organization in charge of the trail in the ‘80s. Scenic Lafayette also has added a walking trail and designated biking paths for the azalea trail and hopes to see it again become the kind of tourist attraction it proved to be in the past.

"For it to become that big in the ’80s, it’s got the ability to really, really grow," Fisher said.