**Colorful Lafayette Azalea Trail Opens**

This Week As Azaleas Bloom Extravagantly

"Late March and Early April" is a phrase that has been buzzing about Lafayette the past month as if it were some magic formula that will transform the city from a wintry drab into a spectacular array of color and spring beauty.

Late March and Early April "has startled out from posters and stickers, has been in the newspapers and over the radio, and has hung in the air as one passes a street-corner conversation.

The magic phrase has interested not only the city and its surrounding territory, but people in Illinois, Michigan, and New York. It is a by-word for the opening of Lafayette's famed Azalea Trail.

Described by the Chamber of Commerce as "a display of such breathtaking floral color and beauty that it cannot be described in words," Lafayette's springtime Azalea blanket has come to attract national attention and has given this Southwest Louisiana city an attraction that has slowly grown into a business-buzzing show.

The Azalea Trail proper is a marked-off route through 15 miles of city streets that guides the sight-seer through the heart of the floral decorated city and past the garden show places. The Azalea-laden Trail itself is not the only attraction for the entire city is a beautiful display of nature's handwork. Azaleas are everywhere.

With a semitropical climate and an annual rainfall of 24 inches, plus a rich humus soil base, Lafayette is natural for floral beauty. Back some years ago before any serious thought of equipping a city-wide beautification program that would accentuate the city's natural floral gift, Lafayette was noted for its vegetation and shrub flower. Azaleas and Camellias were ever then abundant.

Then civic-minded flower lovers got with the Chamber of Commerce and launched upon a city-wide campaign to beautify Lafayette. The idea was not commercial exploitation or even a Trail, but merely to make the town a more beautiful place in which to live.

The beautification project was begun with the Chamber of Commerce and the garden Club acting as the organizational body about which club and civic workers set out on their program. The city was divided into districts, and teams of workers knocked doors asking everyone to plant their favorite flower or to lay out some Azaleas or Camellias where it was a large-scale operation with seeds and sometimes even plants being donated to those who would cooperate.

The schools and public buildings, neutral grounds, and other public places were planted and it wasn't long until the project began to show its effect—breathtaking beauty throughout the city.

Promoting the Trail as an attraction for visitors was a slow growth of the desire on the part of good citizens to beautify their town. About 1938 the Chamber of Commerce began to send out information to the country on Lafayette's gift from nature, and by degrees the promotion snowballed until now the Trail receives a goodly share of national prominence.

Merchants mention the Trail in their advertising, newspapers and tourist-type businesses have helped promote and, better still, people have told other people about it.

Now one knows when the Azalea season is here not only by the city's beauty but by its crowded streets, its jammed restaurants, and overflowing hotel accommodations. It is estimated that 40,000 people drove here last year during the first year of post-war recreation.

It is only a matter of days now until the Azaleas begin to reach their full splendor.

A foretaste of the beautiful vistas of delicate azaleas to be seen by this year's Azalea Trail visitors is shown on this and following pages.

Limited by the black and white of newspaper photography, the azaleas do not shine forth in all their radiance and glory, but the pictures illustrate the all-out effort put forth by the pretty plants with the butterfly blossoms to make the "Trail" a grand show, well worth a trip to Lafayette.

The above photos were made by Blue's Studio during the height of last year's azaleas season and were made available to the Pictorial by the Chamber of Commerce, which sponsors and promotes the Azalea Trail.

The top picture shows the immense size of the flowering plants. The bottom picture, typical of the many scenes along the Azalea Trail, was made on the campus of Southwestern Louisiana Institute.

The azaleas, more accurate harbingers of Spring than even the robins, came out late this year due to the recent cold weather. Last week's sunshine and warm breezes gave them the long-awaited sign and they burst forth in their delicate though ephemeral beauty.