

# The Leader Triangle Arts & Entertainment

PULLOUT  
SECTION

Research Triangle Park, N.C.

April 26, 1979



Monument at left honors the late A.J. Fletcher, designer of WRAL gardens. (Leader photo by Fred Park)

## Azaleas peak at WRAL gardens

By JANE LITTON

Extravagant swirls of lavender, rose and white form a colorful backdrop as a June bride tiptoes through the afternoon grass after posing for prenuptial pictures. Unbeknown to the casual viewer, her eve-like bower houses the blooms of 1000 azalea bushes (some still unidentified by N.C. specialists), 4,600 pansies, 100 red geraniums and 100 Easter Lily trumpets accented by curving rows of pink English daisies and small-faced violas. All of this brilliant rapture seems natural only to the delighted faces who reflect the love of spring beauty.

This serpentine wave of blossoms belongs to the WRAL gardens, designed and dug, for the most part, by the late chief executive A.J. Fletcher along with Slim Hinton and an additional cohort.

Located on Western Boulevard behind WRAL television station the gardens—a previously conceived amphitheatre—began to take shape in 1959 after Flet-

cher's favorite spring bushes arrived from Wilmington.

In 1972 the 4½ acre site won Fletcher the Landscape Award. Sponsored by the American Association of Nurserymen, this award was presented to Fletcher by Pat Nixon on the White House lawn.

Following in his grandfather's footsteps, Jim Goodman, WRAL's present chief executive, encourages interest and careful maintenance of the grounds.

Mike Fultz, a 1975 NCSU horticulture graduate, works with six others to promote the garden's beauty. "This year", according to the Fultz, "is a great year for azalea bloom." "The moderately rising spring temperatures and significant moisture make for a better azalea bloom."

Mike confided that no severe frost this spring damaged the newly-formed blossoms.

Two miles of underground piping controlled by computer irrigate the garden's forty to fifty varieties of azaleas which bloom from mid-April to mid-May. Some favorites include Formosa,

large lavender flowers; Hiawatha, double pink blossoms; and Hino, small brilliant crimson clusters. The bushes are fertilized once a year after they bloom by a special Fultz-designed system as a part of the irrigation network.

In contrast to the burst of color lies the carpet of green lawn, scientifically seeded and fertilized twice a year. But Mike Fultz says his first love is the woody ornamentals. He knows that azaleas love acidic soil, semi-shade (under pine trees), moisture, and shallow planting. Any size azaleas can be moved successfully, but best in the fall, as Fultz discovered when the irrigation system was dug. Mike is constantly searching for something new, unusual and attractive to cultivate in the gardens.

In the greenhouse built in 1975, Mike grows azalea cuttings gathered from the garden and from other nurserymen, summer annuals, ornamentals, and orchids which are presented to WRAL employees on special occasions.

The gardens are always open but the public is encouraged to view and reserve it for special events, such as weddings, from April to September. The gardens are always beautiful, but this year they may be at their peak—blooming for their original gardener in the springtime of his death.

## Collector's Gallery promotes N.C. art

By AMELIA HARRISON

"We are here as a service to the artist and to those who want to collect contemporary art," remarks Ms. Beverly Ayscue, Curator of the Collector's Gallery of the N.C. Museum.

With that comment, artist Mary Ann Jenkins, who happened to be browsing through the gallery intercedes, "The Collector's Gallery is fantastically fortunate for they'll never find another Beverly. Her vitality, her vivaciousness, her enthusiasm—all project such good feelings about the museum wherever she goes, whether it be talking to the artist themselves or to members of various clubs and civic organizations. All this is so essential for success."

As curator Ms. Ayscue is responsible for assembling exhibitions of works by and about North Carolinians. Stipulated the now embarrassed, but shyly excited brown-eyed lady, "These showings fill the gap in the local contemporary art scene, since the other galleries in the museum represent the thousands of years of artistic works. We're the avant garde for N.C. artists and display art that community galleries don't."

Having discovered that "it's more productive to have exhibitions back to back for one month" and "to correlate these showings with the Museum's exhibitions," Ms. Ayscue, since coming on board in November 1975, has seen annual sales increase some 150 percent, especially in those busy months of December, January, and June. And these sales are without any advertising, except for mailing announcements indicating for-

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