

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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AAS in NOLA

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This photo was taken literally during the calm before the storm, when minutes later all 70-plus attendees of the All-America Selections (AAS) & National Garden Bureau (NGB) Summit dashed into the conservatory you see in the background when some Gulf Coast rain arrived in buckets.

AAS and NGB host an annual event for everyone involved in the organizations, people who sell and/or grow AAS winners, or anyone who wants to learn more about AAS/NGB and wants to visit one of the display gardens. This year, the summit was held during the first week of October in New Orleans and Baton Rouge.

Both famous cities offered different plant-themed sites to explore, including the City Park New Orleans Botanical Garden that you see here. One of the oldest urban parks in the country (founded in 1854), the 1,300 acres include winding paths and gardens lush with flowering shrubs, annuals, perennials, sculptures and some very old oak trees.

The one you see in the inset is 175 years old, but there are others in the park that are more than 800 years old.

A stroll through the Garden District and Lafayette Cemetery No. 1 (because when you're in New Orleans, you HAVE to walk through one of the cemeteries) and a visit to Perino's Garden Center rounded out the first day. The second day took us an hour north via the 23-mile Lake Pontchartrain bridge to visit AAS trial sites at Louisiana State University's Hammond Research Station and the Burden Display Garden to see how many of the AAS entries and winners survive in the intense Louisiana heat and humidity.

The reason for such a varied itinerary is to make sure no one gets bored, explained Diane Blazek, AAS/NGB Executive Director. "Only so many trials in one day can keep the interest of even the most passionate plant geek!" she joked.

So the goal is to include AAS winners in a display garden or two, along with some educational and/or cultural-type visits during the trip.

"Like in New Orleans, seeing the Garden District was kind of a wake-up call that not everyone plants their front yard with begonias and petunias," said Diane. "We heard that the culture there embraces old, hand-me-down plants and a lot of regional shrubs, vines and trees. As a whole, maybe our industry needs to pay attention to cultural, as well as regional, differences and figure out where that fits into our businesses."

Next year, AAS and NGB will be teaming up with the Perennial Plant Association to co-host an event in the Chicago area. Block out July 29 to August 2, 2019 on your calendar now so you can plan on attending.

"Our primary goal is networking between judges, breeding companies, display gardens and industry reps," said Diane. "It's a matter of good communication, sharing of ideas or best practices, and getting updates on our trials and other activities. We like to see the camaraderie between our attendees develop and how everyone grows in their knowledge of our trials and winners, which makes them better ambassadors for AAS." **GT**