

Rock Hill's BIG BACKYARD

By Angela Shoultz

Gardens are places that stir the senses. Where vibrant colors of earth and sky and sweet smells of spring blooms have inspired artful words and beautiful paintings the world over. Even in the largest cities, there remain these coveted pieces of nature left untouched by buildings and busy streets, where couples wed beneath the blue skies of summer and families picnic in the solace of soft green grass. South Carolina gardens thrive year-round in the state's mild Southern climate, and one amazing example is Glencairn Garden in Rock Hill.

A true gift of love, Glencairn Garden began in 1928 when David and Hazel Bigger received a gift of a few azaleas. By the following year, the small gift had blossomed into more than 400 beautiful blooms, and by 1940, it is said that over 12,000 blooms had appeared. For the next 18 years the garden remained in the caring hands of the Biggers. It was after the unfortunate death of Dr. Bigger that Hazel deeded the garden to the City of Rock Hill so that it could be enjoyed for years to come. And it has been. Since 1958 it has greatly evolved in its scope, thanks to the late Robert Marvin, renowned landscape architect who is responsible for Glencairn's remarkable landscape.

Set in the midst of a residential neighborhood on the corner of Charlotte Avenue and Crest Street, this English-style garden currently boasts six acres of lush land, lily ponds, a tiered fountain, reflection pool, Japanese footbridge and extensive walking trails that connect the park to downtown Rock Hill, Winthrop University, small pocket parks and greenway connections throughout the city. Visitors love the vast variety of flora and fauna including dogwood, oaks, cherry trees, redbud, boxwood, wisteria, camellias, crepe myrtles, day lilies and thousands of gorgeous azaleas. Glencairn Garden was even a nominee for Project for Public Spaces' *Great Public Spaces*. PPS is a nonprofit urban planning and design organization that is dedicated to creating and sustaining public spaces that build communities. Another interesting feature of Glencairn is its "Wall of Whimsy"—a tribute to Vernon Grant, longtime Rock Hill resident, renowned illustrator, and the creator of Rice Krispies® characters Snap, Crackle and Pop.

But there are more plans in the works for Glencairn. A master plan of expansion and revitalization is currently underway to make the garden a national tourism destination. The revitalization includes the surrounding neighborhoods, which will benefit from the expanded gardens and community involvement. The plan also includes more linkages and amenities to accommodate locals and the thousands of tourists who visit the garden each year. While peak visitation is usually late March through April at the height of the blooming season, people love the garden's serene environment year round.

More than just a pretty space, Glencairn Garden also is home to citywide events such as the Come-See-Me Festival. First held in 1962, the festival began as a community project for visitors to enjoy Rock Hill's beautiful scenery. But over the years it has grown by leaps and bounds and now spans a 10-day period during the month of April. Considered the largest, all-volunteer managed festival in South

Carolina, the festival attracts over 125,000 participants and visitors each year. It is so popular that it was ranked in the Southeast's Top 20 Spring Festivals in 2004 and 2005.

The brainchild of C.H. "Ickey" Albright, former Rock Hill mayor and state senator, the Come-See-Me Festival has historically focused around the garden. Additional features include music, contests, food and other activities, such as parades, grilling contests, fireworks, tailgate parties, a family fun day and much more. The mascot, Glen the Frog, is even something special—Vernon Grant created over 30 versions of the mascot for the festival, and the spirited frog still graces the festival poster each year.

As you can quickly tell, Glencairn Garden is a haven for its visitors. The colorful landscape and canopies of dogwood and oak trees are great for an afternoon of relaxing or a day of fun at the Come-See-Me Festival. With so many great reasons to visit, we hope you'll go see Glencairn Garden soon.

