

Another Symposium for Rosalynn Carter Butterfly Trail

Each first Friday in May since 2016, the Rosalynn Carter Butterfly Trail has invited crowds to listen to outstanding speakers and to shop for native plants and other pollinator friendly plants in Plains, Georgia, home of former First Lady, Mrs. Rosalynn Carter. The first spring symposium was held in 2016 and the sold-out event has been held each year since then on the first Friday in May. For the first few years, both President Carter and Miss Rosalynn were able to attend, and it was always great to see the attendees' excitement when Annette asked the audience to be seated and the secret service entered with the Carters in tow. For the last few years, it became difficult for Miss Rosalynn to attend but she fully supported the Trail until her death.

The Trail began in 2013 in Plains due to Miss Rosalynn's concern for the decline in the number of Monarch butterflies migrating from North America to Mexico each year. She worried about the habitat destruction, harm from chemicals and the lack of milkweed, the only plant on which the Monarch can lay their eggs. She talked to Annette Wise, a family friend who worked for the Jimmy Carter Institute, about her desire to help improve more habitat for pollinators, and together they started a butterfly garden on the Carter's property. (It is now known as the Memorial Garden and is the final resting site for the Carters). Later a more visible garden was planted along the road outside the Carter compound, and as interest spread, more gardens in Plains were planted. What began as a small trail of gardens has now grown to more than 3000 gardens scattered across the United States, Canada and abroad.

Magnolia District was looking for a district project for the term 2015-2017, and at the time, we were hearing more about the importance and the plight of pollinators. We knew that Annette Wise from Plains was working with Miss Rosalynn in organizing the RCB Trail, so we met with her and hit the jackpot! She was so enthusiastic, knowledgeable and motivated. Magnolia District gladly became involved with this effort. The district and other members of the Garden Club of Georgia, Inc, have since been supporters of the Trail, assisting with the symposia and other workshops and events. Under GCG policies, it is

recommended that GCG support the symposium and it encourages members to plant pollinator gardens and register them on the RCBT website.

In 2018, RCBT was incorporated as a non-profit 501©3 organization and it has been an honor to serve on the Board of Directors with some very talented and supportive members under the leadership of president Annette Wise. The mission of the Trail has always been to raise awareness of the plight and the needs of pollinators and to offer access to both nectar and host plants such as milkweed. Anyone or any organization, such as a school or business, can register their garden on the website. The garden can be as small as a container garden or a large inground garden, as long as both nectar and host plants are included.

So, on May 2, 2025, we will host another fantastic symposium. This year the speakers will include keynote speaker Dr. Alan Armitage, well known writer, speaker and researcher and Emeritus Professor of Horticulture at the University of Georgia. Also presenting will be Dr. Jaap deRoode, who is a biology professor from Emory University and an expert researcher on the Monarch butterfly, who by the way is a RCBT Board member. There will be plant vendors present, such as the Coastal Plains Native Plant Society offering many native plants including milkweed. Lazy K Nursery from Pine Mountain will again be selling wonderful native azaleas (one named after the former president and another for the former first lady) and other vendors, including "Growing Old", Sumter County Middle School FFA and the RCBT. The Garden Club of Georgia, Inc. and Magnolia District are both sponsors of the Symposium.

As the Trail continues to grow, Mrs. Wise and the Board vows to keep Miss Rosalynn's mission alive. This is a wonderful way to spend a spring day-- learning, shopping and enjoying the beautiful gardens in Plains!

Willie Maxwell

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