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Local News

Getaway: Celebrating 50 years of nature reborn

Hodges Gardens, near Toledo Bend, hosts a flurry of activities this weekend to celebrate its long history.

Chéré Coen

J. Hodges may have been a “green” man before his time.

The oil and gas businessman purchased 100,000 acres near Toledo Bend in the 1940s to reforest the area clear-cut by the lumber industry.

“Mr. Hodges wanted to show that you could have sustainable forestry,” said Janice Hutton, interpretive ranger for Hodges Gardens, now a state park. “He was a man before his time in the conservation movement.”

Hodges planted 30,000 acres with trees, but most people visit Hodges Gardens for the 700 acres of rose gardens, Japanese red maples, one of the oldest ginkgo trees on earth and native azaleas, not to mention the 225-acre lake, waterfalls and large collection of petrified wood.



This weekend, Hodges Gardens turns 50, and free special activities will occur from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday at the state park located on Hwy. 171 between Many and Leesville. The day also honors the 75th anniversary of the Louisiana State Parks system.

Festivities include:

- * The Louisiana Equine Council and the Friends of Hodges Gardens will offer a guided trail ride beginning at 8:30 a.m., complete with a chuck- wagon lunch.
- * A 10 a.m. musical performance by students from P.A.L.S. (Positive Alternatives for Learning Success) will be at the outdoor amphitheater, followed by a ceremony featuring Louisiana State Parks Junior Rangers. The Hodges family will be recognized for their 2007 donation of the gardens to the Office of State Parks.
- * Local groups perform beginning at 12:30 p.m. and food will be sold. The public is invited to bring lawn chairs.
- * Art in the Park, with works of artists of the Louisiana Craft Guild, will be set up between the rose gardens and the gift shop. A number of artists will be demonstrating their skills, and artwork will be for sale.

* Antique cars by The Slow Rollers Car Club of Vernon and Beauregard parishes will be on display.

Hodges Gardens also offers 11 cabins on the lake, ranging in price from \$65 to \$90. For more information, go to www.lastateparks.com or call (800) 354-3523.

AthFest comes to Georgia

Historic downtown Athens, Ga., comes alive every June when more than 175 bands and artists perform at AthFest, the Georgia city's annual arts and music festival and a "Top 20 Event for June" named by the Southeast Tourism Society. The best part is it's almost all free.

Now in its 13th year, the festival will be held June 25 through 28, with free admission to the two outdoor stages downtown. Wristbands to attend the "club crawl" on Friday and Saturday evenings cost \$15 in advance or \$20 at the festival.

Headliners include The Black Lips, a self-described "flower punk" band from Atlanta, Patterson Hood and the Screwtopians and the Randall Bramblett Band, Athens musicians who have performed with Steve Winwood, the Allman Bros. and Widespread Panic. Opening bands include Dead Confederate, who recently performed on Late Night with Conan O'Brien; Bloodkin, whose new CD was called "hypnotic" by Rolling Stone and Dreams So Real.

The festival also includes a juried arts market, a family-friendly component titled KIDSFest and local film screenings.

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