

A man and a woman are walking together at an outdoor event. The man is on the left, wearing a blue plaid blazer, a light blue shirt, and a patterned tie. The woman is on the right, wearing a bright pink off-the-shoulder dress with a large bow on the shoulder and a tiara. They are both smiling. In the background, other people are visible, some in formal wear and others in more casual attire.

The Bloom Report

79TH FESTIVAL



79TH NORTH CAROLINA AZALEA FESTIVAL
MELISSA LASARSKY | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



The azalea is more than Wilmington's signature flower. It is a symbol of a community in bloom.

Like the thousands of blossoms that transform our city each spring, every bloom tells a story. It is the story of neighbors becoming volunteers, businesses becoming partners, traditions creating new memories, and a community coming together to celebrate everything that makes Wilmington extraordinary.

For 79 years, the North Carolina Azalea Festival has proudly served as a civic organization dedicated to showcasing the artwork, gardens, history, culture, and spirit of our river-to-the-sea community. While many know us for five unforgettable days each April, the Festival is truly a year-round movement powered by more than 1,000 volunteers, community leaders, sponsors, nonprofit partners, and businesses who believe in the power of bringing people together.

This year's Bloom Report reflects far more than attendance numbers, marketing impressions, or economic impact. It tells the story of a community investing in itself. Every parade entry, scholarship awarded, concert enjoyed, volunteer hour served, and sponsorship secured represents another opportunity to strengthen Wilmington's sense of place while creating meaningful economic and cultural impact for our region.

The North Carolina Azalea Festival continues to evolve while remaining deeply rooted in the traditions that have defined us since 1948. This year, we expanded partnerships, introduced new programming, celebrated cultures through International Blooms, welcomed new sponsors into our Festival Family, and continued finding innovative ways to engage audiences long before the first bloom appears and long after the final event concludes.

As we prepare to celebrate our milestone 80th Festival, our work is already underway. The journey begins on October 1 with the annual Azalea Golf Classic at River Landing, the first official event of our anniversary season and a reminder that the Festival never truly ends. Throughout the year, we will continue cultivating relationships, supporting our community, creating new traditions, and building momentum toward another unforgettable celebration.

Our theme, *Flowing with Tradition. Blooming with Possibility.*, captures exactly who we are. We honor the legacy of those who built this Festival while embracing the opportunities that lie ahead. Like the Cape Fear River that has shaped our community for generations, we continue moving forward, carrying our traditions with us while creating space for new ideas, new partnerships, and new generations to become part of our story.

To our volunteers, sponsors, partners, and every member of our Festival Family, thank you for helping our community bloom. Your investment extends far beyond a single event. It strengthens our local economy, celebrates our culture, inspires civic pride, and ensures that the North Carolina Azalea Festival remains a vibrant symbol of Wilmington for generations to come.

As you turn these pages, I hope you'll see more than the accomplishments of the 79th Festival. I hope you'll see the impact of an entire community working together with purpose, passion, and pride. Most importantly, I hope you'll be inspired to join us as we look ahead to all that will bloom next.

Melissa Lasarsky
Executive Director
North Carolina Azalea Festival



Lil Jon,
2026





The Festival Story

ABOUT US

The North Carolina Azalea Festival is Wilmington's annual community celebration and the largest festival of its kind in the state. Founded in 1948, the Azalea Festival has emerged as Wilmington's premier event. The Festival's concerts, fairs and special events are attended by an **estimated 250,000 people**. Each event is a celebration, beginning with the arrival of Queen Azalea at the official opening of the five-day event. Everywhere the blooming azaleas offer colorful testimony to the rich heritage of coastal Carolina.

MISSION

The mission of the North Carolina Azalea Festival is to be nationally recognized as a showcase for our community's rich array of artwork, gardens, history, and culture through recreational, educational and family-oriented events. The Festival **encourages volunteerism** and civic participation as it **contributes to the region's economy** and promotes the unique qualities of our river-to-the-sea community.



IMPACT

In 2011, the University of North Carolina Wilmington conducted an economic impact study measuring the effects of the North Carolina Azalea Festival on our community. The study found the Festival generates more than **\$50 million in annual economic impact for our region**. We also boast a **volunteer corps of over 1,000** (our #festivalfamily) who work tirelessly each year to ensure the best events and experiences for our guests.

FESTIVAL FAMILY

The Festival would not be possible without the contributions of dedicated community members, including:

- 5 Board Members
- 4 Full-Time Staff
- 5 Seasonal Staff
- 196 Chairs & Co-Chairs
- 72 Committees
- 26 Emeritus Volunteers
- 1,000+ Volunteers
- 19 Youth Committee Members
- 5 Interns



First Queen Azalea, Jacqueline White, 1948
Photo Courtesy of the
New Hanover Public Library



78th Queen Azalea
Bethany Joy Lenz



The Avett Brothers,
2021



T-
Pain,
2024



46th Queen Azalea
Kelly Ripa



Ronald Reagan &
Queen Azalea Debra
Paget, 1959



79th Queen Azalea
Elaine Hendrix





Creating Experiences That Drive Economic Impact

Airlie Luncheon Garden Party - Art Unveiling - Azalea Golf Classic - Azalea Seahawk Sun Run - Azalea Sweep - Battleship Boom & Bloom Fireworks Bonanza - Boxing Tournament - Brigade Boys & Girls Club Visit - Celebrity Reception - Chefs' Showcase - Concert Series - Dink If You Dare Pickleball Tournament - Fashion Show - Fireworks Show - Festival Press Conference - Hospital Visit - Jingle at the Golf Barn with Cape Fear Volunteer Center - Parade - Parade Reviewing Stand - Past Presidents' Party - Patrons' Party Gala - Performing Arts Multicultural Stage - Pet Royalty Photo Contest with paws4people® - Pageant People's Choice Contest - Queen's Coronation - Queen's Dance Party - Scholarship Princess Pageant - School Visit - Static Aviation Display - Street Fair - Tunes & Blooms



FESTIVAL ASSOCIATED EVENTS*

AFTER GARDEN GET DOWN | *LM RESTAURANTS*
 COIN SHOW | *THE LOWER CAPE FEAR COIN CLUB*
 CAPE FEAR GARDEN CLUB AZALEA GARDEN TOUR AND RIBBON CUTTING © | *CAPE FEAR GARDEN CLUB*
 JURIED ART SHOW AND SALE | *THE WILMINGTON ART ASSOCIATION*
 HISTORIC WILMINGTON HOME TOUR | *THE HISTORIC WILMINGTON FOUNDATION*
 WIZARD OF OZ | *THALIAN ASSOCIATION COMMUNITY THEATRE*
 CAPE FEAR'S CELEBRATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTS AND CULTURE | *THE DELTA FOUNDATION*

*Associated Events are predominantly organized and produced by an entity other than the Azalea Festival. The Azalea Festival uses its marketing reach and other Festival resources to help ensure these events are a success, with proceeds largely benefiting the individual entity. This is a way for the Azalea Festival to broaden our reach while supporting other groups in the community.



FESTIVAL PROGRAMMING

Azalea Festival Youth Committee - Queen's Court & Cadet Escorts - Festival Fun Guide -
International Blooms - Middle School Writing Contest -
Jean A. Lawler Emeritus Program - Past Presidents' Program - Pin Pal Program -
Volunteer Appreciation - Volunteer Recruitment - Youth Art Contest

INTERNATIONAL BLOOMS - INDIA

The North Carolina Azalea Festival continues to make intentional efforts to be inclusive and share our region's rich cultural heritage. Through the International Blooms Program, the Festival chooses one country to highlight each year which was highlighted throughout the Festival at various Festival events through special musical and dance performances, invited guests and groups representing the country, food and art displays, and more. Thanks in part to the support of nCino and Cape Fear Community College, **Indian** culture was showcased at the Chefs' Showcase, Parade, Street Fair, Performing Arts Stage, Fashion Show, the Patrons' Gala, Festival Committee meetings, and more!

PIN PAL PARTNERS

presented by  **Wilmington Grill**

A Fine Tile Gallery
Auggie & Zo
Beach Bagels
Blakeley's
Bookworm Pottery
Browning Tire + Auto
Burney's Sweets & More
Coastal Succulent & Design
Craft Cabana
Daisy On Front
Green Light Escape Room
Julie's Boutique
Kale Me Crazy
Lilly Pulitzer

Little Locals Clothing Co
Luminous Boutique
Mimi and Papa's Popcorn
Moon Me Wax Studio
Odyssea.co
Orange Theory Fitness
Outer Banks Hammocks
Polar Ice Wilmington
Regal Events DJ
Social Coffee
South End Surf Shop
SUNDays Surf Cafe
Swahili Coast
Sweetwater Surf Shop

The Busy Bloom
The Children's Museum
The Cozy Bookwyrn
The Fuzzy Needle
The Latimer House Museum
Tiny Weld Permanent Jewelry
Tropical Smoothie Cafe
Tusc Boutique
Y2NOTOK
Yaki Express
YogaSix
Wave Aesthetics
Wrightsville Ave Boutique



PRESS COVERAGE

As it is our mission to become nationally recognized, we know we need our media partners to help spread the **Festival spirit**. Throughout the year, we keep our media friends up-to-date on current Festival events through **press releases** and meetings to determine **coverage**. As one of the largest events in the state - Festival Week receives extensive local, regional, and national media coverage.

PURCHASED AND TRADE MEDIA

The Azalea Festival works with many **regional media partners** to promote the Festival. We use multiple media platforms, including **digital, social, radio, print, cable** and **network TV**, and **outdoor billboards**. Ads are purchased and also offered on trade for Festival tickets.

\$149,657

MEDIA VALUE

\$34,377

RADIO BUYS

\$76,980

CABLE AND NETWORK
TV BUYS

\$32,000

DIGITAL BUYS

\$80,657

ESTIMATED TOTAL
TRADE MEDIA





IN THE NEWS

[← Back](#)

A COMPLETE GUIDE TO THE NORTH CAROLINA AZALEA FESTIVAL 2026

Jan. 28, 2026

Each spring, Wilmington comes alive with color, tradition and celebration during the North Carolina Azalea Festival. Spanning five days and more than 25 events, this longtime festival blends Southern hospitality, arts and culture, live entertainment and seasonal beauty across Wilmington and Wrightsville Beach.

Whether you're visiting for a single event or planning a full festival weekend, here's everything you need to know before you go.



EVENTS

9 things to know about the 2026 NC Azalea Festival in Wilmington

Wilmington StarNews

April 4, 2026, 5:02 a.m. ET



Advertisement



N.C. Azalea Festival earns USA TODAY 10BEST honor

The N.C. Azalea Festival in Wilmington shines as USA TODAY 10BEST No. 7 Flower Festival winner, hailed for its southern charm.

Spring in Wilmington means azaleas, big crowds and one of the city's biggest weeks of the year as the North Carolina Azalea Festival returns April 8-12, 2026.

Azalea Festival President shares what to expect at 2026 festival

April 8, 2026 by WWAY News

EVENTS

Former Queen Azalea makes surprise appearance during 2026 festival



John Staton
Wilmington StarNews

2026 North Carolina Azalea Festival to bring road closures to downtown Wilmington

April 8, 2026 by WWAY News



(Photo/WDI)

WILMINGTON, N.C. (AP) — Road closures and traffic changes are planned in downtown Wilmington this weekend as the North Carolina Azalea Festival Parade and Street Fair return, according to...

North Carolina Azalea Festival events continue today



REYNA CROOMS
REYNA CROOMS TV

12:06 58°
WECT 6
NEWS



The Azalea Festival utilizes Festival marketing channels to keep various audiences updated on Festival events. Three platforms heavily utilized are our website, email marketing, and social media.

355,076

WEBSITE PAGE VIEWS
www.ncazaleafestival.org
(April 17, 2025 - April 17, 2026)

75,269

EMAILS OPENED
(April 17, 2025 - April 17, 2026)

242,429

WEBSITE USERS
www.ncazaleafestival.org
(April 17, 2025 - April 17, 2026)

39,001

EMAIL SUBSCRIBERS

82,039

SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS
(Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn)

WEBSITE

The Festival Website is used to provide event information and to promote event ticket sales. It is also used heavily for registration and application purposes: Volunteer, Street Fair vendor, Parade, Scholarship Pageant, Boxing Competition, and local/regional musical performers. The website is also used to funnel donations and a place for sponsor logo recognition. Additionally, the website is used to showcase our Invited Guests and houses Festival historical photos.

EMAIL MARKETING

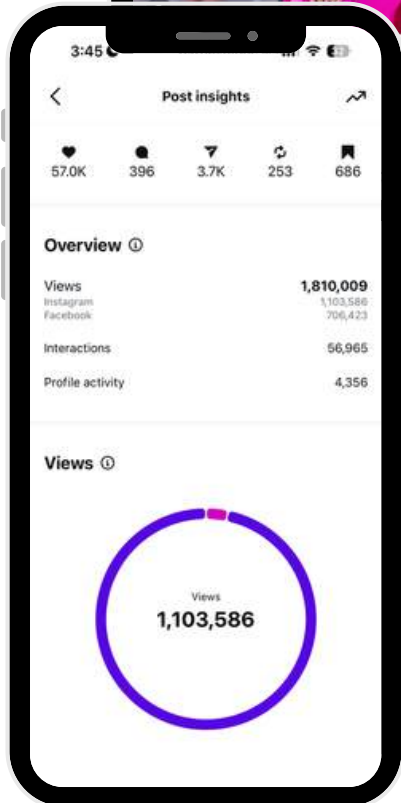
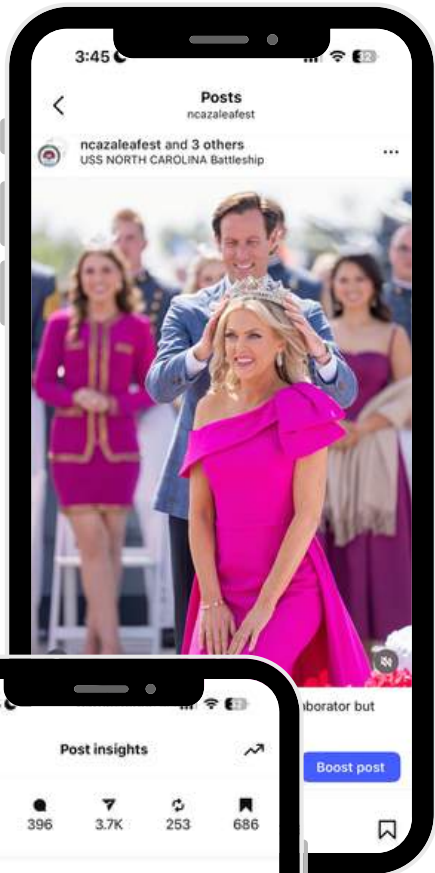
Festival Email marketing is also used to provide event information and to promote event ticket sales. Through our Email marketing campaigns, the Festival is able to drill down audiences into specific groups, targeting those more likely to purchase certain event tickets or merchandise based on past sales. We are also able to target specific event attendees, informing them of weather delays or other necessary event information. Festival Concert attendees receive an email the day prior to their show with relevant information, and Street Fair Vendors receive information about what else is happening during Festival week, in case they should want to join the festivities. Emails are also used to stay in communication with our volunteer chairs, Emeritus volunteers, and Past Presidents. Press releases are sent out through our email marketing platform, which makes them more visually appealing and informative. Higher-level sponsors are listed on every email, which provides an amazing amount of sponsor exposure. The Festival also has a monthly E-newsletter, "Here's the Dirt," which provides insider access and special perks to our fans. We boast a 30.1% Email open rate for "Here's the Dirt."

SOCIAL MEDIA

Festival Social Media is also used to provide **event information** and to **promote event ticket sales**. The Festival relies on contests and giveaways on social media, giving away tickets and Festival merchandise while growing our contact lists. These contests **drive social media engagement, promote events**, and (since they are often tied to our sponsors), provide great **sponsor exposure and interaction**.



ANALYTICS



Overview Performance Feed preview

Performance

Overview			
Views ⓘ	Interactions ⓘ	Link clicks ⓘ	Follows ⓘ
706.4K	5,514	396	0

Social Media | Queen's Coronation post on FB: 706,400 views
Email marketing | November Here's the Dirt: 49.3% open rate with 26,502 delivered, and 162 clicks.







ORGANIZATIONS AND NON-PROFITS

The Festival is proud to highlight, showcase, or partner with over 40 community organizations in efforts to help support their missions.

501 Legion - Aurora Fossil Museum - Big Buddy/Cape Fear Volunteer Center -
 Bikers Against Child Abuse - Brooklyn Music Arts Academy - Canines for Service -
 Cape Fear Community College - Cape Fear Garden Club - Cape Fear Jeeps -
 Central & West Rotary - Children's Museum - Coastal Horizons - Colgate Children's Van -
 Downtown Business Alliance - Delta Foundation of the Cape Fear - Dreams of Wilmington -
 GLOW Historic Wilmington Foundation - Isaac Bear Science Students - Jack & Jill of America -
 Kids Making It - Kind Behavioral Health - LGBTQ Center of the Cape Fear Coast -
 Lower Cape Fear Historical Society - paws4people - Pop Warner -
 Residents of Downtown Wilmington - School of Rock - Shine Your Light Singers -
 Southport Lions Club - Stonewall Sports - Thalian Association Community Theatre -
 UNCW Annual Giving - UNCW Athletics- UNCW Greek Life - UNCW Women's Soccer -
 Wilmington Apartment Association - Wilmington Downtown, Inc. - Wilmington Fire Department -
 Wilmington Performing Arts - Young Scientists Academy





DOWNTOWN BUSINESS ALLIANCE

The Festival is proud to partner with local downtown businesses to highlight local stores. The following downtown business participated with Street Fair booth space.

Pepper Palace - Wicked Bull Trading Post - Lyn & Lou -

Little Locals Clothing Co - Wilmington Water Tours - Swahili Coast -

Daisy on Front - Black Cat - Modern Legend - GEMS4U - Homebody Collective - Memory Lane Comics - Ponysaurus Brewing Co.

EDUCATIONAL CONNECTIONS

The Festival is proud to partner with local Education Institutions to provide community connections, funding, and mutually beneficial connections.

UNCW

The Festival is proud to partner with UNCW by offering full and part time internships to Seahawks. NCAF supports an applied learning award in support of the internship program.



CAPE FEAR COMMUNITY COLLEGE



NCAF is a proud contributor to the CFCC Endowment that provides scholarships to students. In addition, culinary students gain hands-on experience in food preparation and service at the Chefs' Showcase.

Carpentry students collaborate with our International Blooms partner country to design and build a Parade float.

YOUTH ART & WRITING

The North Carolina Azalea Festival Youth Art Contest is an annual art contest showcasing the amazing artistic talents of the youth in our community and across our state. Public, private, and home-schooled students, grades K-12 are invited to submit their artwork to the contest. There is a K-2 Division (Elementary), a 3-5 Division (Elementary), a 6-8 Division (Middle), and a 9-12 Division (High School).

Middle and High School students submitted a descriptive essay or poem for the writing contest. Over 100 thoughtful, interesting, and creative entries are received annually and judged by a local team of writers. Winners and finalists are selected from each category and receive various prizes from the Azalea Festival and outside the community.



SCHOLARSHIP PAGEANT

Scholarship Opportunities

Azalea Festival Princess Court: \$15,050

The newly crowned Azalea Festival Princess is awarded \$6,250 in scholarship dollars. 1st Runner Up receives \$3,000, 2nd Runner Up \$2,300, 3rd Runner Up \$2,000, and 4th Runner Up is awarded \$1,500.

Dr. Sarah Pless Renaissance Dental STEM Award: \$2,000

The recipient of the Dr. Sarah Pless Renaissance Dental STEM Award receives \$2,000 in scholarship dollars.

Top Ad Salesperson: \$250

This award is given to the contestant who raises the most money in selling ads for the Pageant Program booklet.

People's Choice: \$250

The People's Choice Award is decided through an online photo contest, where the contestant who receives the most votes from the public is deemed the winner.

Miss Congeniality: \$250

The Miss Congeniality Award is voted on by the contestants and recognizes the individual who demonstrates exceptional friendliness, approachability, and kindness throughout the competition.

McKinley Lanier Community Service Award: \$250

This award is given to the contestant who logs the most volunteer community service hours throughout the duration of the Pageant meetings, in honor of 2022 Azalea Festival Princess, McKinley Lanier.





AZALEA FESTIVAL SPONSORSHIPS

As a 501(c)3, the Azalea Festival relies on the generous support of sponsors for the funding needed to put on an event of this magnitude and **impact to our community**. Sponsors are part of our Festival Family. Our staff works to ensure every sponsorship delivers meaningful value and measurable exposure. As a 501(c)3, some of the Festival sponsorship monies are tax-deductible for our sponsors.



GLEN DALE EVENT SPONSORS: Casamigos, Embassy Suites by Hilton Wilmington Riverfront, LM Restaurants Family of Brands, Loyal 9, South State Bank

BENEFACTOR SPONSORS: Dr. Sarah Pless, DDS: Renaissance Dental Studio, Duke Energy, Hawthorne Residential Partners, Lumina on Wrightsville Beach, NC Ports, Segra, Sunbelt Rentals, The Elia, The Wilson Center, UNCW, Unity Auto Group

GABLE EVENT SPONSORS: Active Entertainment, Harris Teeter, Horton & Mendez, Live Nation Premium Experiences, Michael & Russell, PLLC, nCino, Perry's Emporium, REV Federal Credit Union, River Landing, Sheetz, Wells Fargo, Wilmington Grill

DONOR SPONSORS: Aperol, Catalyst Clinical Research, Civil Works Contracting LLC, Coca-Cola, Colonial Marketing Group, Corning Incorporated, Garden City Mortgage, Jungle Rapids, Samet Corporation, TD Bank, Total Wine & More, TowneBank Mortgage, United Bank, Wilmington Convention Center, WWAY

EVERGREEN EVENT SPONSORS: Atlantic Union Bank, Battleship NORTH CAROLINA, Beach & Barn, California Closets, Capital Vacation, Cellular Sales, Community Foundation of NC East, Duplin Winery, GriffinEstep Benefit Group, Hamlet Barclay West, Harris Teeter, Kevin Walker Foundation, Liberty Health, Lumina Gem, Northing Bundt Cakes, Old North State Trust, Passanante's Home Food Service, Patio Enclosures by Great Day Improvements, Paula & Albert Corbett, Polyhose Incorporated, Skywalker Roofing, Southeast Foundation and Crawl Space Repair, T-Mobile, Travel + Leisure Resort Development, Trillium, UNCW, Wallaby Windows, Wilmington Grill, Wilmington International Airport

PATRON SPONSORS: Patron packages are available for individuals and businesses looking for a comprehensive Festival ticket package. As a financial way to support the Festival, these packages are the foundation of Festival fundraising. Patrons receive a sponsor listing on the Festival website. In 2026 the Festival had 285 Patrons.

TRANSPORTATION SPONSORS: Azalea Limousine Service

RV TRANSPORTATION: Rex & Sons RVS

LEGAL REPRESENTATION BY: Ward and Smith, P.A.

OFFICIAL STYLIST OF OUR ROYALTY: Camille's of Wilmington



SPONSOR RECOGNITION

Onsite Recognition



Social Media Recognition



Email Footer

(All Marketing Emails)

Website Home Page

Sponsor Page Footer





Thank You

