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- I'm with Jenny Burghardt in Aiken, South Carolina. Jenny's the Director of Tourism. Jenny, what makes this such a wonderful place to come to visit?

- Aiken it is such a great town. We have so much history here. We have a downtown that's full of locally owned shops, cafes, great places to eat. Aiken is also known for our equestrian community. And just down the road, we have our horse district, which is pathways of dirt roads for horses and riders alike. And today, I'm especially excited to be focusing on our citywide arboretum.

- This is a perfect place for it. What makes this street so beautiful?

- Absolutely. Well, this is South Boundary, and it was named by *USA Today* as one of the top 10 prettiest streets for a stroll in America.

- Covered with these live oaks.

- Absolutely. So people love to come walk, and drive, and see the oaks on South Boundary. But even more than that, the city, as a whole, has one of the most diverse municipal landscapes in the country. And Hitchcock Woods is just down the road, which is one of the largest urban forests in America with 65 miles worth of trail. I believe Bob McCartney with Woodlanders is just down the road at the start of the arboretum trail if you want to go meet up with him.

- Well, I do. I'm excited to learn more about the trees in Aiken, and I want to thank you for meeting with me this morning.

- Absolutely. Thanks for coming.

- Bob McCartney of Woodlanders Nursery with this wonderful reputation for rare plant material, plants shipped all over the world. Tell me about a citywide arboretum. What is an arboretum?

- Well, Amanda, an arboretum is a collection of plants, mainly trees, that are planted for aesthetic, scientific, educational purposes and documented as to origin and species.

- What makes the arboretum here unusual?

- The Aiken citywide arboretum is not designated parcel of land like most arboreta. It's everything within a four mile radius of downtown Aiken, including public properties and private properties.
- And oaks, which are iconic to the low country, are displayed. The live oak is displayed in an unusual and beautiful way.
- Well, we have a street here in Aiken called South Boundary Street that's lined with an allee of big live oaks that are a hundred years or more old. And they arch over the street, and that's sort of an iconic Aiken scene.
- And in Aiken, you're blessed when you go to plant trees because it's laid out with broad spaces and streets, isn't it?
- That's right. Aiken was laid out on vacant land that was all longleaf pine land originally. And when they laid it out, they laid out these broad parkways with a street on either side. And these have a diversity of trees for a long time in these parkways.
- Is there one area that has a great variety of oak trees native and from around the world?
- Well, we do have, we believe, the biggest oak collection in the United States. We have oaks from all over the world that we've assembled. But mainly throughout town but a mile along the railroad track by Park Avenue, there's a different oak species every 55 feet from Mexico, from the Middle East, from Asia, from Western US, from everywhere. And perpendicular to that along Buford Street is another mile with a different species every 55 feet.
- Do they look different? Or do they all look like great big spreading oak trees?
- No, they're very different. Some are evergreen. Some are deciduous. Some are big trees. Some are medium-size trees. Some are shrubs.
- How do you find out about them? Don't you have a way that people can learn about these oaks as they walk around there?
- We have a cell phone tour in Aiken on Colleton Avenue and on at Hopelands Gardens where certain trees, about 150 at this point, are labeled that people can learn about the trees that are labeled by dialing the number on their cell phone and putting in the tree number and listening to the message.

[AUDIO
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- The white-flowered empress tree is a large and fast growing tree from Taiwan It is one of several kinds of empress trees seen here. In early Spring, before the large heart-shaped leaves comes out, it is spectacular with huge clusters of large, white, trumpet-shaped flowers marked with purple and throughout. This specimen was received from the US National Arboretum.

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- Bob, you mentioned Hopelands Gardens, and that's a place people love to visit in Aiken. Will they see certain trees that you think are particularly beautiful if you visit there?

- Definitely. Hopelands Gardens was a former winter colony estate and adjoining rye patch the same. And they're now a city park and very well laid out designed by the famous South Carolina landscape architect Robert Marvin actually. And there are a number of trees there that are original big live oaks, and big deodar cedars, and lots of new trees that have been planted that are rare things.

- You said magnolias, which there's such an interest in now. Do ya'll have those there?

- Yes, there's a lot of species of magnolias. Most people know the regular bulled bull bay magnolia or southern magnolia, but there are many, many magnolia species from Asia and Mexico, both of which are represented in Hopelands.

- Is Hitchcock Woods part of this arboretum? And what does it represent that shows us what Aiken used to be?

- Yes, Hitchcock Woods is a 2100-acre urban forest right in the middle of Aiken that has been preserved for many, many years and has a very good representation of native trees that are wild here. And we may even have the biggest longleaf pine in the state. We may have the state champion shortleaf and the state champion gordonia in Hitchcock Woods.

- Do ya'll use fire as a way to maintain that?

- Absolutely. Hitchcock Woods is burned on a regular basis for the last 20 years or so. It reduces the fire hazard danger for Aiken, plus maintains the natural longleaf pine ecosystem.

- A lot of beautiful estates are here, and I understand that some special trees are even planted on private property and yet are considered part of this arboretum. What are some of the special trees we might see?

- Well, we might see some really rare things like, well, we'll see some citrus, which people may not expect to see in Aiken. We'll see a monkey puzzle tree from South America. We'll see a Magnolia maudiae from South China. We'll see a variety of things.
- And you have a very, very rare pine tree here at Aiken I understand.
- Yes, at one of the estates there's a nice specimen of Pinus bhutanica Bhutan, next to India. And there are probably very few of those in the United States.
- What do you hope will happen to this wonderful collection here in Aiken?
- I hope it'll be perpetuated, and appreciated, and and promoted as an asset and a tourist attraction for the future.
- Bob, thank you for your contributions to horticulture, not just here in Aiken but around the world, and for bringing these beautiful trees to South Carolina.
- Well, thank you for coming to see us.
- And I'm going to go see some of these trees on my way home and say goodbye to Jenny.
- Thank you.
- I feel like I've had a tour of the world with Bob of the wonderful diversity of trees you have here at Aiken. This has been terrific. And if people want to know more about how to find out about Aiken in general and the trees, where should they go?
- Yeah, they can visit our website site at www.visitaikensc.com. And that has information on everything you need to do, where to eat, where to stay. It also has links for the arboretum trail and the web-based app, which actually has information on all 100-plus trees. They can also call our visitor's center and train museum at 803-293-7846, and we'll be happy to answer any questions on what to do in Aiken.
- Well, I want to thank you for the wonderful time that I've had here today.
- Well, thanks for coming. We loved having you.

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