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For Immediate Release

Contact person: Bill Dailey (501) 315-7373

Email: purplehull@juno.com

Web site: www.purplehull.com

PurpleHull Pea Wins "Festival of the Year"

It wasn't easy keeping the good news from Mildred Beene. It had already been on the radio.

But Beene, chairman of the Emerson PurpleHull Pea Festival for the past three years, had no idea when she entered the festival's committee meeting Thursday evening that the members would present her this year's ALFie Award trophy for "Festival of the Year."

Fortunately, Beene doesn't listen to the radio very much.

"I was surprised," said Beene.

She was also very happy. So were members of the committee.

The Emerson PurpleHull Pea Festival & World Championship Rotary Tiller Race won the "Festival of the Year" title earlier this week at the annual meeting of the Arkansas Festival Association, held in West Memphis.

Previous winners include much larger festivals such as Little Rock's Riverfest, the Hope Watermelon Festival, and Conway's Toad Suck Daze.

"It's a huge compliment to the PurpleHull Pea Festival," said festival spokesman Bill Dailey. "The key is that the

judges look at not only the size of your festival, but how well a festival performs with the resources it has. And we do an awful lot with very little."

In fact, according to the Arkansas Festival Association, the Festival of the Year award is presented "to a festival or other special celebration, which stands out among all the festivals in Arkansas, by its creative approach, crowd appeal, media coverage, and/or enhancement of community pride, thus benefiting the state's quality of life."

The awards, referred to as the ALFie Awards (Arkansans Love Festivals) are given in various categories each February at the Arkansas Festival Association's annual meeting. Their purpose is to "honor the best and brightest of Arkansas's festivals and special events."

Attending this year's meeting were Bonita Ferguson and Crista Mosley of Emerson. After winning the top prize, they decided to keep the news a secret and surprise "Ms. Mildred" at Thursday's committee meeting.

In previous years the PurpleHull Pea Festival had won ALFies in categories including "Best New Festival," "Best New Idea" (twice), and the "Community Trademark Award."

This year, in addition to winning the top award, the festival was also runner-up in the "Community Trademark Award," which is given to "those communities that have achieved success toward the enhancement of their local resources through imaginative and innovative festival

development efforts." Camden's BPW Barn Sale won this year's ALFie in this category.

"A whole lot of folks around Emerson and the surrounding communities put a huge amount of time and effort into the PurpleHull Pea Festival and its tiller race," said Dailey. "The reward is being able to pull off a fun, quirky festival. But it's also nice to be recognized."

For more information about the PurpleHull Pea Festival, phone Mildred Beene at (870) 547-2707, or go to the festival's Web site at www.purplehull.com, or email purplehull@juno.com.

The PurpleHull Pea Festival will be a two-day event this year, June 28 and 29. The festival's feature event, the World Championship Rotary Tiller Race, will be Saturday, June 29.