

Shangri La

is 'Lost' no more

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By Tommy Mann Jr.
and Ashley Sanders

The wonders of the Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center in Orange are lost no more.

Lumber heir and prominent philanthropist H.J. Lutchter Stark created his own mystical retreat in 1937 after reading James Hilton's "Lost Horizon."

Those rare oddities and exquisite nature trails created by Stark all those years ago are no longer tucked away inside a fortified fence, as one of Orange's most valuable tourist treasures is now open to the world.

A tranquil refuge from the maddening chaos of busy commuters and workers outside it's towering walls, the 252-acre education facility and botanical gardens is located at North 16th Street and West Park Avenue.

"Shangri La is one of the best

places to rekindle your sense of wonder about nature and the beauties of gardens," said Michael Hoke, executive director for Shangri La. "This can be a reviving experience for people, and I think it will be."

Inside the park, Hoke encourages guests to admire the 1,226-year-old Pond Cypress tree which borders Adams Bayou while on a tour of the Nature Outposts, or take in the majesty of the Pond of The Blue Moon while strolling through the gardens.

In the children's garden, visitors will enjoy searching for the queen bee in a giant, glass encased beehive while standing beneath the "bottle trees."

The row of trees may have shed their leaves for the winter months, but there are plenty of purple bottles to draw a spectator's eye towards the enchanted branches.

Admirers of nature will also



Tours in Shangri La offer the public an opportunity to view nature up close and undisturbed.

enjoy taking in the sights of lavish bat houses or spying egrets perching high above the bayou.

Presently 1,500 long-eared bats call Shangri La's Bat Meadow home. Just down the bayou, many more winged creatures have set up housing in the park.

From Shangri La's Heronry Blind, guests can view 17 species of birds. Bird watchers can get a birds-eye view of the majestic feathered creatures themselves by viewing televi-

sion monitors attached to cameras affixed high in the Cypress trees.

It is a re-birth of nature that Hoke and others hope will draw crowds to the historic and bountiful grounds.

For years after Stark's initial creation, Shangri La played host to weekend guests and admirers to nature.

By 1950, thousands of people had visited Shangri La and most magazines which often feature gardens had published photographs of Shangri La.