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## PRESS RELEASE

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Laura A. Kunkle

America in Bloom Executive Director

### **America in Bloom Judges to Visit Mansfield, Ohio**

Professional volunteer judges from the America in Bloom (AIB) national awards program will visit Mansfield, Ohio on July 10 and 11. This is Mansfield's debut year as an America in Bloom participant, and it is one of the many proud and passionate communities across America working on local revitalization programs with an eye to receiving a prestigious America in Bloom national award.

Mansfield joins Saratoga, California; St. Charles, Illinois; and Henderson County, North Carolina in the 25,001 – 50,000 population category.

In addition to a receiving detailed written evaluation from the judges citing strengths and opportunities for improvement, participants receive a bloom rating and special mention for what the judges deem to be an extraordinary project or program. Additional awards that can be earned are as follows:

- Population category winner
- Outstanding achievement award – the “best of the best” over all participants in each of the six evaluated criteria
- Special awards
- Community Champion
- YouTube Video

Population category winners are invited to participate in international competition via the Communities in Bloom program in Canada.

Judges will be evaluating the community's efforts in the areas of overall impression, environmental efforts, heritage preservation, landscaped areas, urban forestry, floral displays, and community involvement in the municipal, commercial, and residential sectors.

The judging team is Ed Hooker and Alex Pearl.



Ed Hooker



Alex Pearl

**Ed Hooker, III** currently serves as the first Historical Architect of the National Cemetery Administration (NCA), Veterans Affairs (VA). The NCA oversees 131 National Veterans Cemeteries through the United States and Puerto Rico.

Hooker began his career in federal service in 2006 as the Historic Architect and Cultural Resources Manager at Fort Riley, KS. After graduating from Auburn University with a degree in architecture, he began his career in historic preservation with the Alabama Historical Commission, the Alabama State Historic Preservation Office, where he worked with communities to realize the potential of their threatened historic landmarks. He later was the historic architect for the Mobile Historic Development Commission, where he staffed the city's Architectural Review Board and provided preservation guidance and architectural design assistance to residents of Mobile's eight historic districts.

Hooker credits his passion for historic preservation to growing up in the Black Belt region of Alabama, volunteering as a docent for his community's annual pilgrimage, and being made aware at an early age the importance of heritage and history. He considers himself an avid amateur gardener, and enjoys container and patio gardening. Ed also served for two years on his town's AIB Committee.

**Alex Pearl**, from Centerville, Ohio has been an AIB judge since the America in Bloom's inception. He is also among the group of founders. Alex is a retired horticulture educator whose career has taken him in many different directions. He has held positions in higher education, botanical gardens, private industry and in his own business.

Alex retired from the State of Ohio in 2011, where he taught Vocational Horticulture for the Ohio Central School System, a charter school of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections. Alex holds horticulture degrees from the State University of New York, and New Mexico State University, a Masters in Botanical Garden Management from the University of Delaware and a Masters in Education from Ohio State University. His is an active member of various trade and amateur horticultural organizations.

His long association with "in bloom" programs through America in Bloom and the Canadian program Communities in Bloom has taken him to cities across North America and Europe. He is a strong advocate of the benefits in bloom programs provide people and communities. Alex's motto is 'plants change lives'.

To date, nearly 250 communities from 45 states have participated in the program and more than 22 million people have been touched by it. Awards will be announced on October 5-7, 2017 at AIB's National Symposium & Awards, held this year in Holliston, MA.

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America in Bloom is an independent, non-profit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to promoting nationwide beautification programs and personal and community involvement through the use of flowers, plants, trees, and other environmental and lifestyle enhancements. America in Bloom provides educational programs, resources, and the challenge of a friendly competition between participating communities across the country.