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## PRESS RELEASE

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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America in Bloom Executive Director

### **America in Bloom Judges to Visit Washtucna, WA**

Professional volunteer judges from the America in Bloom (AIB) national awards program will visit Washtucna, Washington on July 18. This is Washtucna's second 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.

Washtucna joins Elfin Forest, CA; Edmonston, MD; Castle Rock, WA; and North Beach, MD in the under 3,500 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 members are Kristin Pategas and Laurie Waller.



Kristin Pategas



Laurie Waller

Kristin Pategas is a certified Landscape Designer, horticulturist, and co-owner of Hortus Oasis, a boutique landscape design firm in Winter Park, FL. Kristin and her husband, Stephen, co-authored the book *Southern Coastal Home Landscaping*, and together they write two local gardening columns.

Kristin's career began in 1982 when she joined the Walt Disney World Company as a plant pathologist at The Land, EPCOT. During her 18 years with Disney she also managed the Walt Disney World Nursery, developed educational programming for the Epcot International Flower & Garden Festival, and was a Program Manager for The Disney Institute. In 2001 she joined her husband and they started their business, Hortus Oasis. In her free time, Kristin practices sustainable gardening at their home, hunts for new plants, and donates her time and talents to her community and America in Bloom.

After 25 years as a teacher, Laurie Waller retired and moved to Arroyo Grande, California, where her husband Richard was born and raised. The Waller family were flower seed growers throughout the twentieth century. Curious about coastal California horticulture, Laurie began volunteering with the local America In Bloom group, Arroyo Grande In Bloom, an all-volunteer, non-profit group. In 2009, Laurie took over as floral displays chairperson for the group and established the current Floral Displays program in Arroyo Grande. In the course of planning and executing three plantings a year during an extended period of severe drought, Laurie completed the University of California Master Gardener program, where she currently volunteers as a helpline consultant. Under Laurie's stewardship, the floral displays program has flourished and been recognized for top honors within AIB. Additionally, Laurie developed and fostered a relationship with local commercial greenhouse growers who donate more than 90% of the plant material used in the container and basket program in floral displays. Laurie also runs a successful business, is a board member and officer of the local business association, and a board member for Arroyo Grande In Bloom.

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.