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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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America in Bloom Judges to Visit St. Charles, Illinois

Professional volunteer judges from the America in Bloom (AIB) national awards program will visit St. Charles, Illinois on July 13 and 14. This is St. Charles' third 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. In 2016, St. Charles distinguished itself by taking home a coveted Outstanding Achievement award for Landscaped Areas and is working to build on its success.

St. Charles joins Saratoga, California; Henderson County, North Carolina; and Mansfield, Ohio 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 are Ed Hooker and Galen Gates.



Ed Hooker



Galen Gates

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.

Galen Gates has over 30 years of professional experience in horticulture. At the Chicago Botanic Garden, Galen was a key player in creating 27 world-class display gardens and 4 natural-habitat environments - the perfect job for someone who has always loved construction and is a certified "plant freak." Galen is knowledgeable in plants, their ornamental characteristics and cultural requirements, garden design, public displays, site improvements, and construction. A widely-recognized plant expert, he has collected and studied plants on 24 trips into 20 countries - efforts that have enriched the botanical understanding and diversity of plants in the U.S. Galen has contributed to over 90 books and penned 20 journal articles, and is a strong believer in education. He initiated and taught the Chicago Botanic Garden's first education course and initiated and programmed three popular annual conferences.

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.