

BEST IDEAS

★ Community Involvement ★

Citizens' involvement in projects for the betterment and enjoyment of the entire community; for example, AIB committee, horticulture/garden clubs, 4-H, school children, seniors, service groups, volunteers involved in long and short term projects and recreational programs (e.g., Family Day, Clean-Up Day, etc.).



Westfield, NJ. Volunteers at work.



★ Community Involvement— The Bedrock of America in Bloom ★

By Linda Cromer, AIB Judge

Community involvement is the bedrock of America in Bloom. One of the eight criteria groups, it is also an important factor in assessing the other seven criteria. When working to enhance community involvement, recognizing that broader promotion translates into better participation is a given.

Let people know what you're up to. Highlight your town's America in Bloom activities on your municipal website and include a link to AIB's homepage. Ask local churches to mention the program and related projects in their weekly bulletins. Enlist civic organizations like the Lions Club, Rotary and Kiwanis by asking them to put AIB on their meeting agendas as a talking point. Contact the various Scout councils and invite their ideas and participation.

Most people like to stay current on what's going on in town. Be sure to keep these groups updated on your town's AIB projects and events so their interest stays active and they're armed with knowledge when their constituencies have questions.

Once you have everyone's attention, pick targets and make plans for action. Look around for a needed project and figure out how best to "spread the love" to involve as many groups as possible. Is a litter-strewn vacant lot near downtown an eyesore? Enlist a church group or Boy Scout troop to spearhead a cleanup day. Ask the city's public works department to provide waste bins and remove collected trash from the site. Invite the Garden Club to do some planting. See if a local business will help pay for plant materials. Ask the neighborhood pizzeria to furnish lunch for volunteers.

Many civic organizations have ongoing projects. Embrace those projects and offer to assist. Maybe you can help them find partners or link them with citizen volunteers for special events like charity relays and carnival fundraisers. Arts groups are often looking for performance or display venues. Help them explore opportunities to team with local businesses. Ask the Chamber of Commerce or Bureau of Tourism for assistance.

It's important to remember that the warm, fuzzy feeling we get when we volunteer is great, but a pat on the back makes it even better. Volunteers, whether individuals or groups, should be recognized and applauded. Businesses are often more generous when positive publicity generates public feedback. Municipal departments and employees like to hear that their efforts make a difference.

A community is far more than just a collection of buildings in close proximity; it's the magic that happens when individuals, social groups, businesses, and institutions work together. America in Bloom provides a perfect framework for promoting community involvement. It creates an awareness of the importance of each of us to all of us and gives us the resources to turn good intentions into positive outcomes. ★



Population 5,000 and under

★ Aurora, IN

- The city vehicle prominently marked with America in Bloom proudly announces the town's commitment to the program.
- The city sponsors a youth essay with the theme of "What would I change about Aurora." It's a nice way to get youngsters thinking about leadership and how they can affect improvements.
- The city holds a community picnic for beautification awards. The invitation sent to all residents includes a packet of annual flower seeds.
- The community service day brought hundreds of students and volunteers to assist in cleaning up the streets, sidewalks and curbs in the downtown and along the river banks. Bright green t-shirts were worn by all. Volunteers were given coffee and donuts when they registered and picked up their supplies. Papa John's Pizza provided pizza for lunch. The mayor gave "I Love Aurora" pins to all the volunteers.
- Aurora keeps a record of all the volunteers and the hours they commit to beautifying the city. A volunteer appreciation day is full of fun, food and door prizes sponsored by the mayor, city of Aurora officials and Main Street Aurora.
- The Aurora In Bloom program has entered into a partnership with the Lions Club, Main Street Aurora, the local public library, the schools, garden clubs, Scout troops, Master Gardeners, businesses and many others to promote beautification in Aurora.
- The library has an endowment allowing it to be generous in support of community events such as the annual beautification awards



Aurora, IN.
Top: "Bloom Mobile."
Bottom: Community picnic and awards.



picnic. The library staff is supportive and enthusiastic.

- High school students are required to donate one day of community service each year.
- The fire department is staffed completely with volunteers and allows the community to use its well-equipped kitchen and meeting facilities. The fire safety trailer is taken to schools and community events for safety education.
- The We Care Group collects food and sends it to troops overseas. The city provides space for storage and packing. One of the volunteers said, “There are no city limits in our hearts.”
- Children decorate Christmas trees in the city hall council chambers.

★ **Echo, OR**

- Kindergarten and first graders wash Echo’s city vehicles while parents proudly watch and praise.
- The library has been cheerfully decorated by the library director. She has loaned some of her personal collectables for display.
- One of the reasons that volunteerism works well in Echo is that



Echo, OR. Kids wash city trucks.

the city is generous with praise. Echo is known for offering awards, volunteer appreciation events, and excellent communication via its comprehensive and up-to-date website and the award-winning monthly newsletter.

- A resident has landscaped areas at the town’s golf course clubhouse and each hole of the golf course with perennials from her own garden.
- The city sponsors a National Night Out when families are encouraged to come out and enjoy the parks. Attendance at the event has



Echo, OR.
Top: Volunteers beautify the golf course.
Bottom: Golf shoes get planted.

increased nearly 300% since the city started presenting the annual beautification awards on that night.

- One particularly touching event is Firefighter Appreciation Day. On this day the town's volunteer firefighters are recognized with certificates. In addition, residents are encouraged to say a personal word of thanks to them, perhaps even giving them a plate of fresh, home-baked cookies.
- The town worked with Oregon State Senator David Nelson to introduce a bill recognizing Echo's participation in America in Bloom.

★ **Elfin Forest, CA**

- *Elf Alerts* are email notices sent to all community members to inform them of important events.
- The community worked with the governor's office to get a personal welcome letter for the AIB judges from Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.
- The community worked with the County Board of Supervisors to proclaim May as "America in Bloom" month in the entire county, which is larger than Rhode Island.



Elfin Forest, CA. County Supervisors proclaim "America in Bloom month."

- A Spring Fling potluck dinner was held and awards were presented for outstanding properties.
- A Citizen of the Year is honored and a plaque is installed for that person along the community's heritage trail.
- A 244-page, full-color community guide book was published with resources for living the rural lifestyle.

★ **Eureka Springs, AR**

- The Eureka Kids helped assemble the playground equipment in Harmon Park, police the new one-of-a-kind skate park, and designed and planted a garden.
- Members of Eureka Kids are involved in after-school and summer activities, community service, a food program, family services and a community center. They accept responsibility for maintenance of park facilities giving them a sense of ownership.

★ **Greendale, IN**

- "Getting Together is to Get It Together" is the theme for the city of Greendale regarding involving the community.
- The Greendale Civic Garden Club, with over 200 members and about 25 business memberships is very active in getting the community to come together and be involved. Some of the activities include an annual flower sale to promote awareness of America in Bloom, a yearly plant swap, plant installation and maintenance of the floral baskets on Ridge Avenue

youth councils and commissions to plan, plant, and beautify the town.

★ **Bemidji, MN**

- The Bemidji in Bloom (BIB) committee is evaluating the idea of incorporating as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit so that it can raise funds for beautification and landscaping programs.
- The Arts Council acquires sculptures on loan from artists for downtown street corners. These are available for purchase.
- The Lions Club donated play equipment for Lehman Park.
- Rotary and Jaycees each donated pavilions on the shore of Lake Bemidji.
- The city and Chamber of Commerce sponsor a Polar Bear Plunge as a fundraiser in January. A hole is drilled in the ice and people jump into the lake.
- The fire department is staffed by volunteers.
- Bemidji College works with the city and the Chamber of Commerce on surveys and studies.
- WalMart provides funding for many community projects and donated \$40,000 to various city projects and groups when it opened.
- The chair of the BIB Committee wrote weekly articles for the local newspaper about the America in Bloom program.
- Master Gardeners write periodic articles on seasonal gardening topics for the newspaper.
- The Bemidji mayor and city council annually invite volunteers to an open house at city hall to recognize their valuable contributions.
- Volunteers give hundreds of hours to plant the areas around city hall, the library and alongside the lake walk.

★ **Buffalo, MN**

- Buffalo's America in Bloom Committee sent postcards to residents



Buffalo, MN. Volunteers.