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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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America in Bloom Executive Director

America in Bloom Judges to Visit Henderson County, North Carolina

Professional volunteer judges from the America in Bloom (AIB) national awards program will visit Henderson County, North Carolina on June 8-9, 2017. This is Henderson County's fourth 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.

Henderson County joins Mansfield, OH; Saratoga, CA; and St Charles, IL in the 25,000 – 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 members are Ed Hooker and Leslie Pittenger.



Ed Hooker



Leslie Pittenger

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.

Leslie Pittenger is an AIB board member who chairs the national awards program committee and serves as the judge coordinator. Although her "official" position is City Auditor for Belpre, her passion for the improvement of her area has inspired community volunteers. Belpre received the 2013 and 2014 Outstanding Achievement Award for Community Involvement sponsored by the American Horticultural Society under her leadership as local AIB committee chairwoman. As an active member of the Belpre Garden Club and Belpre High School Greenhouse boosters, she works with local students to complete environmental and beautification projects. Currently serving her second term as auditor, her department has received the Ohio Auditor of State Award for exemplary financial reporting the last three years. She has completed the Ohio Tree Commission Academy course and has her Commercial Applicator license for pesticides through the Ohio Department of Agriculture. Leslie is the co-editor of the Best Ideas annual edition. She serves on the board of directors for the Belpre Alumnae Association and the Belpre Area Community Development Foundation. She graduated from the University of Georgia and was a business owner for 10 years. Leslie believes in – and has experienced – the value of AIB for the benefits it can bring to the well-being and pride of small towns across America.

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.