



For immediate release.

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### **America in Bloom Judges to Visit Venice, FL**

Professional volunteer judges from the America in Bloom (AIB) national awards program will visit Venice, FL on April 28 and 29. This is Venice's third year as an America in Bloom participant, and 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 2015, Venice won its population category.

Venice joins Winter Park, FL; Greenwood, SC; and Calabasas, CA in the 20,000 to 30,000 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 Award

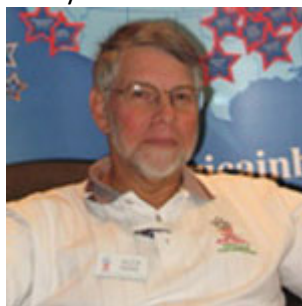
Population category winners are invited to participate in international competition via the Communities in Bloom program in Canada.

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

The judging team members are Tony Ferrara and Alex Pearl.



Tony Ferrara



Alex Pearl

**Tony Ferrara** has served 16 years on the Arroyo Grande, CA. City Council and 12 years as the city's elected mayor. Tony has held a number of municipal leadership positions including Board Chair of the San Luis Obispo County Air Pollution Control District Board, and the County's Integrated Waste Management Board. More recently, Tony was the President of the League of California Cities, an advocacy and lobbying organization representing all 482 cities in California. Tony's passion is his 8-year involvement with Arroyo Grande in Bloom as both a volunteer and member of the AGIB Board. He is proficient in the development of municipal/volunteer relationships and promoting conservation and historical preservation programs. Tony holds a Master's Degree in Public Administration with emphasis in the Behavioral Sciences from the University of Southern California; and a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration from the University of Redlands. He is a former faculty member for the California State University Long Beach, as well as the University of Phoenix. He is second vice president on the America in Bloom Board of Directors.

**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 Master's 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 41 states have participated in the program and more than 22 million people have been touched by it. Awards will be announced on October 6-8, 2016 at AIB's National Symposium and Awards, held this year in Arroyo Grande, CA.

America in Bloom is an independent non-profit 501c3 corporation. America in Bloom envisions communities across the country as welcoming and vibrant places to live, work, and play – benefiting from colorful plants and trees; enjoying clean environments; celebrating heritage; and planting pride through volunteerism.

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