

Time to Bloom

COMMUNITIES IN BLOOM

I have paddled a voyageur canoe down a major river, been shot at with black powder guns, stuffed in the rumble seat of a model T, danced a northern jig on a river boat in Kapuskasing and flown into a community on a 1953 Beaver. I have travelled the breadth of Canada from Prince George, B.C. to St. John, NB in three weeks stopping for three days of whirlwind tours in each of the assigned eight communities. It is an experience where each community makes every effort to impress, where the local politicians greet you at the airport and where every meal is a community event. At times I thought I was campaigning for political office with all the handshaking and hugging, however I remembered I was only a Communities in Bloom national judge.

Communities in Bloom arrives like spring, full of the promise, rejuvenation and revitalization. An initiative that originated in the United Kingdom with Britain in Bloom it is now a worldwide competition; one the City of London will compete in for the second time. Volunteers run the organization with a few paid staff at headquarters in Montreal while registration fees, corporate sponsorship and governmental grants fund the program; both provincial and national judges donate hundreds of hours of volunteer time to the organization.



The Canadian version called Communities in Bloom is a non-profit organization committed to fostering civic pride, environmental responsibility through community participation and the challenge of a national competition. The benefits of involvement are many, such as an increasing civic pride and community involvement with participation from all ages and walks of life. Citizens, groups, organizations, businesses and municipal government working together towards a common goal; that of civic beautification and community improvement. Communities in Bloom is not a seasonal project as one would think from the name but is a year round project and a process of continuous improvement for, by and within the community. It is one of the few organizations that brings all of the different service groups in a community together, working towards a common goal.

Volunteers will appear everywhere and herald all that is good within our community. Groups will be rallied to clean up unsightly areas, floral displays will be enhanced, policies will be reviewed and the whole community will be swept with a big broom the day before the judges arrive. It can be a competitive business, for in an afternoon, a full day and a brief morning all that is great about London has to be shared with the judges. The two judges must leave impressed, dumbfounded and always remember London over all other communities if we hope to achieve the top prize in the provincial competition. London needs to compete on the National stage but to do this it must score over 80% in the provincial competition. Last year we were beat by Mississauga, which achieved the coveted 'Five Blooms' allowing it to proceed to the Nationals.



London will be judged in eight criterias, which will total over one thousand points. Judges will look at Tidiness, Environmental Awareness, Community Involvement, Heritage Conservation, Urban Forestry, Landscaped Areas, Floral Displays, Turf and Groundcover Areas. They will do all of this in one and a half days, and in that time, will see the heart and sole of the city.

What can London do to excel? We can role out the municipal programs, showcase our tree care initiatives, display our parks and floral displays with pride while industry leaders tout the benefits of doing business in London. Will this impress the judges; I doubt it, what will impress the judges is Londoners getting involved in their communities. Grass roots initiatives and local community projects will show the judges the big city with small community togetherness.



Competing in the over 300, 000 population category is easy and challenging. Easy, as last year there were only two competitors, London and Mississauga. The challenge will be displaying a sense of community, something small communities can do quite easily. I am sure Londoners are up to the challenge.

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