

## **Community pride and volunteer engagement propels Chatham-Kent to National Award**

In front of an international audience of 750 participants, Chatham-Kent (CK) was announced as the national champion in the Communities in Bloom (CiB) competition for the 50,001 to 150,000 population category. In their evaluation, Stephen King and Mario Fournier, the national judges were quick to note “the overall community benefits could be seen everywhere, not only through physical and landscape enhancements but through community involvement and pride.” They commended CK for “outstanding community and volunteer efforts; well landscaped community centres; very friendly people and community pride. Chatham-Kent and its citizens have embraced and taken advantage of Communities in Bloom. Municipal staff are well trained, enthusiastic and care greatly about their community. The numerous community volunteers and groups reflect the same passion and commitment to their community. An excellent team effort!”

CK received special recognition for heritage conservation efforts. “We were impressed with the diverse approach to heritage conservation that was evident throughout Chatham-Kent. This ranges from man-made to natural history and extends across the spectrum to mechanical, automotive and agricultural heritage as well. Heritage conservation was showcased geographically and supported by community related festivals. On the human history side, this includes First Nations, early European settlements and early Black history, including the underground railroad. Museums, art and cultural centres, pioneer villages, heritage homes as well as theatres and other special features are located across Chatham-Kent. All have excellent education programs. A few examples of excellent heritage restoration and reuse include the Chatham Capitol Theatre, Retro Suites, and the Armoury, Bothwell’s Theatre, Erieau’s Veterans Memorial and the Highgate Mary Webb Centre.”

Internationally, the benefits of beautification are well documented. There is a direct link between an attractive community and economic growth. CiB projects create a more attractive, conscientious community and an improved quality of life. It not only draws new residents and businesses, but provides a better environment for those already here.

The CiB program is recognized for having made a positive difference in so many ways; the enhancement in green spaces, protection of both the natural and cultural heritage, increased civic pride and engagement, a greater appreciation for a quality, sustainable environment, positive benefits for tourism, retail and horticultural sectors, marketing opportunities and much more.

The Municipality of Chatham-Kent lies within a spectacular countryside. Each community within the Municipality is unique and contributes to a rich mosaic of the community. “People, Plants and Pride... Growing Together” is the CiB slogan, and it captures the essence of the CK program.

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**MORE...**

**Caption:**

*On Saturday October 30, 2010 Chatham-Kent Communities in Bloom delegates accept National Communities in Bloom award. Pictured from right to left are Councillor Karen Herman, Manager Parks, Cemeteries and Horticulture Tom Beaton, Communities in Bloom Coordinator Monica Moore, General Manager Community Development and Planning Services Don Shropshire, Communities in Bloom Volunteer Committee Member Bob Todd, National Judges Mario Fournier and Stephen King.*

**For more information:**

Monica Moore – Communities in Bloom Coordinator

Tel: 519.352.7354 x4225

E-mail [monicam@chatham-kent.ca](mailto:monicam@chatham-kent.ca)

**General Media Contact:**

Brian Worrall, Communications Officer

Tel: 519.360.1998 x3624

Cell 519.355.4060

E-mail [brianw@chatham-kent.ca](mailto:brianw@chatham-kent.ca)

***Backgrounder follows...***

## **BACKGROUNDER – CK Communities in Bloom**

Inspired by National beautification programs which have flourished in England, France and Ireland, for decades, the first Canadian Communities in Bloom (CiB) edition was held in 1995. Starting with only 29 communities, the competition has now grown to involve over 100 communities at the national level with hundreds more in the provincial editions.

CiB is a non-profit Canadian organization committed to fostering civic pride, environmental responsibility and beautification through community participation and the challenge of a friendly competition. CiB promotes involvement and action by citizens of all ages, the municipal government, local organizations and businesses. It not only strives to improve the tidiness, appearance and visual appeal of Canada's neighbourhoods through the imaginative use of flowers, plants and trees, but the program also focuses on environmental awareness, the preservation of heritage and culture to successfully improve quality of life.

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Chatham-Kent (CK) started in a non-competitive class in 2002, moved to "Provincial" for one year, and since has qualified to compete nationally. CK is distinctly different from other competitors in its class. Volunteer effort, donations and in kind services drives the grass roots program. CK has soared up the evaluation grid of the CiB competition as local volunteer interest in the program grew.

Not only has the Municipality earned the highest attainable 5 Bloom rating at the national level since 2005, but two prestigious International Criteria Awards have been awarded as well. The winners of these awards have to outperform over 100 communities of all population categories across Canada, Britain, Ireland, Scotland & Japan.

In 2006, CK received the international Scott's Best Community of Gardeners Award which gives credit to "the hard work of the volunteer CiB committee members who were able to successfully portray a community-wide gardening spirit that was unmatched!"

CK received its second international award in 2009. To win the Communities in Bloom Tidiness Award, the municipality was the overall tidiest community out of all of the Canadian and International competitors. Judges commented that "having tidy streets, sidewalks and buildings in a municipality of over 616 000 acres is clearly a partnership effort involving the entire community!"

National competitors receive special recognition for their community's most exceptional efforts. Over the years CK has been commended for its Volunteer Participation in Community Programs, Community Involvement, Garden of the Week Program, the municipality's Community Partnership Fund, student summer staff, and empowerment of community members.

CK annually sets out to boost participation, increase its overall score and maintain the top honour of a National 5 Bloom status. CiB committee volunteers selflessly dedicate their time to not only prepare for the judging days, but they strive to make CK a more attractive destination and a better home throughout the entire year. In order to make this a truly flourishing and blossoming municipality

though, it takes the effort of every member of the community to join in around their own homes, neighbourhoods and businesses.

This year the community did just that. Expert national CiB judges Stephen King and Mario Fournier were in Chatham-Kent from July 21-24, 2010. In a well orchestrated event, the committee managed to showcase our expansive community over three and a half 10 – 12 hour days. It is not possible to show them all the wonderful accomplishments in all of CK in that short time, so a huge component of the judging process is an elaborate 150 page written and pictorial documentation of achievements. The judges receive this a few weeks prior to the physical judging.

CK has competed in CiB for the past nine years and, as much as being rated a top “5-Bloom” community for the sixth straight year is wonderful, actually winning our population category is the ultimate honour! It is something the whole community has worked hard toward all along, but it couldn’t have been done without the tremendous committee volunteers. They are the ones who truly have each of their communities embracing the CiB program and its ideals.

Jackie Beatty, Bothwell CiB committee representative says, “Communities in Bloom has meant a great deal to the community of Bothwell and to Chatham-Kent as a whole. It is about so much more than flowers; it is, as the motto says, ‘People, Plants, and Pride Growing Together’. Communities in Bloom has not only bolstered pride of place in individual communities but, by having monthly meetings that bring together volunteers from each area, it has done a great deal to foster the broader identity of Chatham-Kent as our home. In my opinion, this program is one of the best I’ve participated in for including outlying communities, and as such I feel it should be used as a model for future community building initiatives.”

The CK CiB committee is an incredible team of volunteers dedicated to the improvement of our Municipality. They are not only devoted to CiB projects, many take on daily mentoring of the CiB horticultural maintenance students. They collect information year round, promote projects, prepare grants, raise awareness and plant, weed and water floral & community gardens. They organize, decorate, and even pick up litter.

Volunteers from the communities of Blenheim, Bothwell, Charing Cross, Chatham, Dresden, Erieau, Highgate, Merlin, Mitchell's Bay, Ridgetown, Tilbury, Thamesville, Wallaceburg, and Wheatley all partner with educational institutions, local organizations, service clubs, community members, municipal staff and corporate and private businesses across the municipality.

CK’s CiB volunteer committee and the individuals and groups that they in turn recruit, have been noted by past judges as our particular and unique strength. From a core committee group of 25, the program draws on a volunteer force of approximately 300 individuals. They see a community with strong partnerships and teamwork supported by Council. They see volunteers undertake projects important to their particular area. Volunteers provide the municipality with in-kind products, thousands of hours of labour, expertise and use of equipment. Each year they demonstrate the incredible value, beyond just flowers, that comes out of CiB. The judges’ expert recommendations inspire volunteer projects and by soliciting partnerships and resources, their visions are successfully implemented to ultimately enhance CK.

CiB has brought people from opposite ends of this huge geographic area to work together toward a common goal. The community involvement is phenomenal. It is a combined effort of the horticultural

societies, BIA's, Chambers, service groups and just concerned citizens. It has allowed committee members to focus on their similarities, not differences. Neighbouring communities excel because of information exchange opportunities, and ultimately they enjoy working together for the betterment of each other and the greater good! Because everyone is encouraged and valued for their community's unique strengths, they feel like they are an important contribution to CK as a whole.

In the past judges have pointed out that “local volunteers and organizations in the various communities are the strength of the municipality. The strong partnerships and teamwork observed between municipal staff and community members allow citizens to be empowered in undertaking projects.” They add, “From clean-up projects to fundraising to embellishment initiatives to heritage conservation activities to environmental protection and stewardship to support groups, the citizens of Chatham-Kent demonstrate through their action that ‘thinking globally and acting locally’ can strengthen and sustain a community of communities that is Chatham-Kent.”

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*Monica Moore | Communities in Bloom Co-ordinator | Municipality of Chatham-Kent | 25 Creek Road, Chatham, ON N7M 5J3 | T 519.352.7354 ext. 4225 | F 519.352.4241 | E-mail [monicam@chatham-kent.ca](mailto:monicam@chatham-kent.ca)*