



Communities in Bloom in Forestburg celebrates 25 years in 2023

Forestburg has been involved with Communities in Bloom since 1998. It is a municipal program that runs across Canada and in many other countries around the world. It fosters community pride by encouraging participation in improvement of green spaces, heritage conservation and environmental sustainability. In Forestburg, the local committee, the municipality, the Agricultural Society, and the community at large, have been working together in this endeavour for twenty-five years.

In early years, the Village of Forestburg participated annually in the competitive part of the program. Judges would come to the community and evaluate the village's progress in various areas of concern. Only a year after joining, Forestburg won its population category in the 1999 National Communities in Bloom competition held in Halifax, NS.

Through several years in the 2000s, Forestburg participated in non-competitive categories, before becoming a Provincial winner in 2009 and then a National winner again in 2010. This honour was shared with Fogo Island, NL – one of the few times there has ever been a tie.

In the fall of 2011, Forestburg hosted the Provincial Communities in Bloom Awards event. Workshops, tours, and a banquet were enjoyed by representatives from other Communities in Bloom programs around the province and the winners of the 2011 Provincial Edition were announced.

The Village of Forestburg last competed in 2012, this time in the International Edition of Communities in Bloom. From 2013 onward, Forestburg has participated in the National Program's Circle of Excellence, a non-evaluated category, which means no judges visit the community. This is a category for past National Champions. This decision was made as the committee is a small group of volunteers who haven't been getting any younger over the years.

Forestburg's major beautification project is the planter/barrel sponsorship program. About 60 of these are sponsored by businesses and organizations around the community. It's a win-win because the cost includes the plants and the watering through the season, and the community benefits by having all these gorgeous flowers everywhere.

Communities in Bloom also plants the public floral displays at the Farvolden Centre (ATB and Library), the fire hall, and the various pieces of farm equipment around the village. Volunteers do the planting in the spring and have weeding and pruning work bees throughout the summer, but for many years now, the Village Public Works Department has hired a summer employee who spends approximately half their time on Communities in Bloom duties.

Communities in Bloom partners with the Village of Forestburg and Forestburg School to have a Town Cleanup every year in early May. ATCO Electric generously cooks up a hot dog barbecue for all the participants.



With the assistance of Coutts Home Hardware and Tree Canada Foundation, Communities in Bloom developed the Community Centre Park and continues to maintain the trees and shrubs there. In 2016, a large gazebo suitable for weddings and other events was built at the park through the efforts of Communities in Bloom, the Community Centre Association, and private donors. It looks beautiful lit up in the wintertime!

Communities in Bloom projects aren't limited to growing things. The committee purchases sets of winter and summer banners for display on Main Street as well as Christmas lighting for Devonian Park and downtown. During Covid, Forestburg High School was unable to hold ceremonies, so to celebrate the graduates, the school displayed banners for each grad along Main Street. This new tradition has continued! Permanent metal banners depicting local themes and designed by a Flagstaff area artist are on Highway 53 through town.

The Past Times Walk is another Communities in Bloom project. There are twenty signs around the community, interpreting Forestburg's history. The last signs of the walk were installed in 2016, recognizing veterans at the cenotaph located at Forestburg School, and on Main Street, the Cottage Hospital which operated from the 1920s to 1940s, and the Sather Building, now incorporated into Coutts Hardware.

For many years Communities in Bloom held Local Yard Awards which celebrated the efforts of residents, businesses, and organizations at a barbecue where certificates and prizes were presented. Following that was the Best Bloomin' Yard program – a different yard chosen each of 6 weeks of the summer. The homeowners displayed the Best Bloomin' Yard sign on their property for the week and received a gift certificate. Since Covid, there hasn't been an award program.

Forestburg Communities in Bloom would like to recognize the community for participating over the past 25 years. Thank you to all who have been part of the program — serving on the committee, helping plant and weed and prune, judging local yards, improving and beautifying residences and businesses, and coming out to town cleanups and work bees.

Special recognition goes to Bruce Gowanlock, who has sadly passed away, and to Janice Freadrich, who were both longtime chairs of the committee and contributed their horticultural talents to many projects.

Thanks also to the Forestburg Agricultural Society for its contribution to the cost of the Communities in Bloom summer employee for many years and to the Village of Forestburg Public Works Department who assist in Communities in Bloom activities every year.

All in all, it's the **community** in Communities in Bloom that makes the difference.

