

Judges tour Essex for Communities in Bloom

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

Things are happening in the town of Essex, said Communities In Bloom judge Phil Vinet during a visit to a selection of the area's parks and green spaces July 26.

Vinet and fellow CIB judge Angela Vieth spent two days in Essex on their way across the province to evaluate five towns and the quality of life they offer residents and visitors. This is the second year Essex has been involved in the competition. Each participating community is judged on their floral displays, landscapes, turf, urban forestry, community involvement, heritage conservation, environmental awareness and tidiness.

However, the tour is not about measuring winners or losers, Vinet said. It's about recognizing the efforts of each community's volunteers and their determination to make their towns a better place to live.

"The strength of any community is based on the strength of its volunteers," Vinet said. "And if there's one constant we've seen, it is people's pride for their community."

Along with Essex, the two judges will be visiting



Doug Sweet, director of parks and recreation for the Town of Essex, Sean McGivern, chairperson for Communities In Bloom in Essex, and CIB judges Angela Vieth and Phil Vinet take a break from their tour of the area's green spaces at the Essex Train Station July 26. Vieth and Vinet visited a number of local

Glencoe, Thousand Islands, Minto and Dryden.

Everything from a community's environmental awareness, heritage conservation and tidiness efforts will be looked at during their visit.

Sean McGivern, chairperson for CIB in Essex, said the town has a lot to offer.

"We have numerous plans for the future," he said.

A planned refurbishing of trash bins downtown and the annual Clean Sweep Day in May is helping to keep the streets tidy, he said.

The local CIB is also hoping to erect a new gateway sign at one of the town's entrances, and to restore the cannon in front of the municipal building in co-operation with Heritage Essex.

"The best thing about what our organization does

is that we're bringing the community together," McGivern said. "We're showcasing all of the activities in the town, whether it be municipal projects or those of various local organizations."

The CIB judges visited a number of sites, including the train station and

Heritage Gardens, the downtown murals and Garinger Gardens at the Essex District High School courtyard.

McGivern said his group would one day like to include the entire municipality in CIB, including Harrow and McGregor.

Last year Essex received

three blooms out of five in the Communities in Bloom competition. The score for the 2006 competition won't be known until September.

Parks and Recreation Director Doug Sweet said last year administrators from the town were told by the judges that someone from the Essex and District Horticultural Society should attend the Communities in Bloom ceremony in Owen Sound, Ont. Essex was recognized for its score during the ceremony. Sweet said that invitation may be extended this year as well. Kathy Hudak, the Essex and District Horticultural Society president thinks Essex will receive a favourable rating this year as well.

"They were very impressed with Essex," Hudak said about the judges' reaction to the town. "They were impressed with how very neat and clean it was and pretty well weed free. They were really impressed with the downtown flowers this year and with the enthusiasm of the residents about their community."

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SENIORS CONTRIBUTE - Canada's population is aging and as seniors' numbers swell, it's important that Canadians understand the value of seniors to our communities. There's too often a perception that this group is least likely to contribute to society & most likely to draw heavily from social programs: the fear is that seniors will become more of a social and economic burden than an asset. But the facts about the contributions of seniors to Canadian society tell a much different story. Seniors are an important part of the Canadian social fabric. They've earned their pensions by making economic contributions over their working lives and they continue to pay taxes throughout retirement - often paying for services that don't directly benefit them (such as education, daycare, and employment insurance). Canadian seniors now live longer, healthier, busier lives than ever before. In fact, they're among the most socially engaged citizens in the country. While some seniors continue to be gainfully employed, many others contribute to their families, friends and communities through activities such as spending time in children's classrooms, caring for ailing friends and actively working to influence public policies. Senior's social participation benefits Canadian society as a whole. It's important that governments and volunteer organizations avoid adopting ageist attitudes that discount seniors' diversity, interests and needs. Otherwise, Canada may overlook, at its own peril, one of its most precious natural resources. *Taken from "Expression - Bulletin of the National Advisory Council on Aging."*

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