

The 2009 Prairie Garden Award for Excellence

by Linda Pearn

The Prairie Garden Award for Excellence for 2009 was presented to two recipients – **Ken Ivey & Brenda Cameron** (Virden, MB) and **Albert Parsons** (Minnedosa, MB) – at a luncheon at Larters at St. Andrews on Thursday, September 3, 2009. This is the tenth year this Award has been given for Excellence in Horticulture on the Northern Great Plains. Information for the following articles has been excerpted from the nomination papers.

KEN IVEY and BRENDA CAMERON of Virden, MB

Ken and Brenda were volunteer co-chairs of Manitoba Communities in Bloom from 1999 to 2008.

The Communities in Bloom program began in 1995. Virden registered in the program beginning in 1996. Brenda Cameron co-chaired the Virden in Bloom committee and Ken Ivey was an active committee member. This was the beginning of their interest and dedication to the program which quickly caught on across the province and country. In 1999 the national office approached Ken and Brenda to create and manage a provincial office for CIB. They willingly took on this volunteer role and continued to manage the provincial program until 2008.

In their first year as provincial co-coordinators, Ken and Brenda and the Virden in Bloom committee hosted the first provincial awards and seminars event in Virden in



Ken Ivey & Brenda Cameron
(Sandy Venton)

1999. They have worked with a host community every year since doing all that is necessary to organize this annual event. These weekend events have educational speakers and opportunities for communities to network and to share best-practices. “Communities in Bloom, People, Plants and Pride... Growing Together” - that is what it is all about. It is about improving communities so that people, plants, and pride can all grow in a community and Ken and Brenda have guided communities to do just that.

During their ten years in office, 57 Manitoba communities have participated in the Communities in Bloom program and having seen the benefits, many communities have stayed with the program for many years.

Communities in Bloom judges evaluate communities based on a scoring grid made up of eight categories which are: Tidiness, Environmental awareness, Community Involvement, Heritage Conservation, Landscaped Areas, Urban Forestry, Floral Displays and Turf and Ground Cover. Each category is broken down into 4 sections to gauge the involvement and contribution of each sector of the community. The 4 sectors are municipal, commercial/industrial, residential, and groups/organizations (this includes churches, schools, sports clubs, not-for-profits, etc.)

Because of the nature of the program, by getting communities involved, positive changes have taken place in many communities and how they go about accomplishing improvements. They have encouraged new communities to become involved by traveling to communities to make presentations, attend trade shows, and through letters and newsletters. Once communities have registered, they communicate with them to give them guidance on how to get started, ways to form their committees, etc.

With all sectors of the community involved, there is also a greater

capacity to fund projects. Instead of leaving things up to the municipality, businesses and citizens also contribute financial and in kind support. Memorial plantings are self funded with donations. Ken and Brenda have worked very hard to promote the goals and educational opportunities of the Communities in Bloom Program. The seminars and awards weekend have become known as great places to learn new methods and best practices, and bring together those who want to make changes to learn and share. The standard of care, particularly in horticulture, has risen dramatically. By inspiring change in communities to make them appear more attractive and welcoming, many spin off benefits occur in the areas of tourism, economic development, and attracting new residents for relocation. People feel better about where they live.

Another responsibility of Ken and Brenda in their role as co-chairs was to recruit provincial judges that were interested in the program and willing to volunteer one or two weeks of their summer to travel to communities to do evaluations and then spending several hours filling out evaluations. By sourcing highly qualified judges, Ken and Brenda have made it possible for communities to receive very valuable information when judges visit and provide written evaluations.

An additional partnership they formed was with the Composting Council. They were able to partner

to secure funding to create an opportunity for communities to sell composters as a fundraiser while raising awareness of the value of composting.

CIB also makes people realize that heritage is not only buildings, costumes, etc. but that they have heritage trees, native stands of plants, etc. and they are all worth noting and preserving.

To summarize, as part of their volunteer duties in the Manitoba in Bloom office, Ken and Brenda have sourced judges, coordinated the judges tour schedule, held judges training seminars, provided communities with information about the program, and carried out the many responsibilities required to host the provincial awards weekend and looked after the day to day operations of the office.

As provincial co-chairs, Ken and Brenda were also members of the National Communities in Bloom Committee for ten years. Since they have retired from the responsibility of managing the provincial office, they continue to be involved in the MB CIB program. Ken is president of the provincial MB CIB committee and Brenda is also an active committee member. Brenda is also entering her second year as a volunteer judge for Communities in Bloom.

Along with their variety of responsibilities with the Manitoba Communities in Bloom, Ken and Brenda have continued working as part of Virden in Bloom committee.

Virden has registered as a competitor in the program, mentored new communities or participated in a networking capacity. Brenda has served as co-chair of the Virden in Bloom committee for many years.

Ken and Brenda have also both been active in their home community of Virden and in organizations in the region. Ken owned and operated Ivey Greenhouses for 20 years along with his wife Susan. They graduated from Canadian School of Floral Art in Hamilton, ON. Ken has been a member of Chamber of Commerce, Virden Wallace Economic Development Board and Wheat Belt Community Futures Board. Brenda owns and operates Virden School & Office Supplies; is involved in curling, golf and a member of the Virden Art Club. She loves to work in her flower and vegetable gardens.

Congratulations, Ken Ivey and Brenda Cameron, on winning The Prairie Garden Award for Excellence for 2009.

*See the next page for the second
The Prairie Garden Award
for Excellence recipient.*

ALBERT PARSONS of Minnedosa, MB

Albert has been involved in horticulture since childhood when he grew house plants and helped tend the family garden. He became an educator and horticulture was a hobby, then a secondary occupation and after retirement, a second career.

Albert and his wife Edith moved to Birtle, MB in 1970, at which time he began to exhibit in horticultural shows in the area. He grew plants for his own use in his greenhouse and eventually began supplying gardeners with extras. This grew into a larger business which lasted for twelve years.

In the late 1980's, Albert began working on his Ontario Diploma in Horticulture from Guelph University, ON. He moved to Carberry, MB in 1991 and continued with his diploma training. He joined the Carberry Horticultural Society and was president for a number of years. He was involved in developing an open gardens day in Carberry and continued to share his gardening experiences with other gardeners.

After retirement from education, Albert and his wife moved to Minnedosa, MB in 1998. Here he became involved with the Minnedosa Horticultural Society and has served several terms as president. He is involved with the Minnedosa Business Development Committee's beautification program and has served on the Minnedosa Communities in Bloom committee and also as a provincial



Albert Parsons
with his daughter Joanne & wife Edith

Communities in Bloom judge. Albert was chair of the Manitoba Horticultural Convention committee when the Minnedosa Horticultural Society hosted it in 2003.

In his retirement, Albert established a business called Gardens By Design through which he offers garden design advise, landscaping consultation, and offers workshops and presentations to groups on a regular basis.

Albert has also devoted more time to writing. He has published two books, *Gardening In All Four Seasons, Volumes I and II*. He has established himself as a regional horticultural writer and has been published in *The Manitoba Gardener*, *The Gardener for the Prairies*, *The Western Producer*, and *Grainews*. He continues to be a regular contributor to *The Manitoba Co-operator* and his weekly garden column still appears in *The Brandon Sun*.

Albert willingly shares his knowledge and expertise, his garden and its produce, and his love of gardening and the joy it brings him.

Congratulations, Albert Parsons, on winning The Prairie Garden Award for Excellence for 2009. 🌻