

## Lewisburg, West Virginia: A Mayor's Perspective

By John Manchester, Lewisburg Mayor

Before our involvement with America in Bloom, Lewisburg already had in place a lot of the pieces emphasized by AIB. We had a well preserved downtown historic district, lots of floral displays, and several environmental initiatives.



However, the entities responsible for these important pieces of downtown revitalization had no idea what the other groups were doing, and many times had no idea that the other groups even existed. AIB provided the cohesive framework to draw all the volunteer, civic and governmental organizations into the same room to better coordinate the beautification efforts and to designate a group project for the upcoming year that everyone could work on and take pride in accomplishing.



For example, our first pair of judges noticed that an old cemetery, prominently located in the midst of our historic district, was badly in need of repair and maintenance. This cemetery was primarily a burial ground for black slaves from our area. Everyone in town knew the cemetery looked awful, but no one had ever stepped up to say, "I will fix it." When the local members of our AIB group (now known as Lewisburg in Bloom - LIB) assembled to go over the judges' report, all agreed that the situation at the cemetery was a real problem and organized to upgrade the cemetery.

With the backing of Lewisburg in Bloom, local LIB organizer Shannon Beatty made presentations throughout the community about AIB and the importance of revitalizing Lewisburg and this neglected cemetery. Money was raised, the cemetery was cleaned, and plans were made to index the graves and regrade the site. Without AIB providing the fresh set of eyes to point out this problem in our midst, I expect that cemetery would have deteriorated even more rather than serve as an asset within the historic district.



New LIB initiatives in town have helped bring together people, added color, and focused greater attention on our downtown. For example, after LIB was formed, the committee promoted the idea of a unified color scheme which has helped achieve a unified look not only in the downtown area but all over town as well. LIB has even revived an abandoned tradition of the Tree Lighting downtown. The Tree Lighting ceremony has been a great

success drawing just over 100 people during the first year. Each year the crowd grows. Caroling, cookies and hot chocolate are shared in the Center Green Space.

Our participation in AIB has given our community a renewed sense of pride in our downtown. A sense that our community was “pretty good” has been replaced by a sense of our community being “great.” Small improvements like more floral displays and splashes of color have led to more merchants and homeowners stepping up their efforts to beautify their properties.



Our community is still recovering from the 2016 flood event that took so many lives and destroyed so much property in surrounding towns and areas of our county. In the aftermath of such a disaster our communities have supported each other as never before. However, our local economy has struggled to regain its earlier strength. Our participation in AIB has allowed us to enhance the beauty of our downtown and showcase our amenities to visitors to help our recovery and to maintain our pride and appreciation in what we have.

