

## THE BEST SMALL TOWN IN AMERICA - BICKNELL, UTAH

"What a beautiful little town!" "Your very main street is nature at its best." "I'd like to live in a town like this." We have been discovered!

This nearly one hundred-year-old town on the alluvial deposit of the Thousand Lake Mountain faces the southern sun and the Boulder Mountain. The Bicknell townsite is half-circled by blocked fields of alfalfa, grain, and grassy pastures scalloped by the winding Fremont River.

The face of Bicknell town is attractive and peaceful with lawns, gardens, trees, and flowers to enhance its beauty. The Main Street, a continuation of U-24, runs from west to east and continues on past the red cliffs of Sun Glow Park, and the rolling hills carressed by pinion pine and black boulders. But the ever-changing scene is the disappearance of the large cottonwood trees planted by the early settlers.

Over twenty years ago, the irrigation water was placed in a pond and piped in sprinkler systems so the ditches of water were not feeding the deep root systems of the shade trees. The trees were dying. It was imperative that we plant trees and shrubs to prevent soil erosion in our hillside town.

In 1984, the Town Council approved a proposed beautification project. The cooperation of every citizen was needed to help stop erosion, preserve the pleasant environment, replace shade trees, and beautify our town.

The plan included the following:

- Establish a Shade Tree Commission to seek professional assistance
- Obtain financial grants for the planning and locating of problem areas
- Seek to obtain money to install curb and gutters along Main Street
- Create three small parks with grass, trees, shrubs, and flowers
- Provide street-side plantings: evergreens, hardy shrubs, flowers, and wooden half-barrels behind to grow colorful annual flowers

The Shade Tree Commission was organized with four members to assist one council person. The Utah State Extension agent was contacted for suggestions and information. From this, Professor Wegkamp from USU came to inspect our problems. He took pictures and inspired the Commission to sketch several plans for creating mini-parks and street side plantings. He provided slides of beautified areas of other towns. After many planning meetings, there was written and approved a Forest Program. A grant for preliminary planning was received from the Utah Forestry Commission.

The first plantings were made near the east entrance of town. Flowering crab trees were planted alternately with blue point junipers and tamarix. A 'Beauty Spot' was created by hauling fifty-two loads of soil, planting trees, mugo pines, potentilla and flowers around large boulders and a sign, "BICKNELL - WELCOME." Across the street a small area was started with potentilla, tams and hardy perennials to create the 'Desert'. More evergreens were planted along Main Street behind the curb with yellow shrubs and purple petunias behind. The Green Thumb workers watered these areas while the Commission members supervised work-study students in removing all weeds and trash along the ten block length of Main Street. This concentrated effort caught on and many citizens were building fences to hide unsightly storage, painting, repairing, and planting more trees and foliage.

These improvements merited Bicknell being named the "TIDY TOWN" of Utah in 1984 to receive a mini-park and ten shade trees from the Utah Nurseryman's Association. With the Town making a good financial investment and workers providing nearly five hundred hours of labor yearly, we became eligible to be named Tree City USA for six years, 1984-90. Their flag would fly over our 'Beauty Spot' from a pole donated by a citizen.

The Salt Lake Tribune mini-park was installed by next Arbor Day, June 5, 1985. Now we had three small parks that needed sprinkling systems. With the assistance of the town maintenance man, this was accomplished and a third park, 'The Triangle' was begun. Local farmers and timbermen with tractor loaders placed large black rocks and red sandstone on the areas to harmonize with the hills that surround us. We won two blue spruce from the Wayne County Beautification Committee, and a local nursery supplied flowers each year besides those we purchased.

The Town applied for and received \$21,000 from the Community Development Block Grant to install curb and gutter along six blocks of Main Street. After this was completed, more areas were available for plantings. We tried many shrubs, but the cold, dry winters at our 7200 feet elevation killed them. We stayed with evergreens. Of course, each improvement caused more maintenance, but many of the 369 citizens assisted the Commission and students. The yearly town clean-up, the painting of fences, out-buildings, and homes, the watering, hoeing, raking and planting of more trees, shrubs, and flowers all added to the beauty of our town.

Bicknell was soon becoming a tourist center. A new motel was added, a furniture store and super-market were constructed east of town. Many new homes were built. A new church, and gymnasium for the high school were



constructed in 1936. A new seminary was placed on the high school complex, so the Town obtained money to purchase the old building for their office. These added greatly to the aesthetic beauty of Bicknell.

Bicknell hosts the Wayne County Hi-Mountain Rendezvous each year in July. This celebration brings fiddlers, mountain men, and tourists from many states. We provide some of the finest motels and restaurants for Capitol Reef National Park visitors. Many travelers voice their praise and remark favorably about the beauty of our country town.

The citizens seem to enjoy living here and are proud to view the Tree City USA flag flying over the 'Beauty Spot'. This past Christmas, the half-grown trees were ablaze with lights to add to the atmosphere. Last summer the Town won ten more trees for their continued effort of making Bicknell more attractive.

Now, we hope to be named the 'Best Small Town in America'. We greatly need more blocks of curb, gutter, and sidewalk to extend from entrance to exit of our fair town. We need an arched, decorative bridge over one drainage ditch to connect the sidewalks. This would complete our ten year plan for beautification of Bicknell.

References:

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