

Mark Cullen: He is Coming to Maple Creek!

Written by Nola Sanderson

It's not everyday that you hear your idol is coming to town. I was excited, breathless, disbelieving.... all at once!! However, as I shared the news that Mark Cullen was the prize for 2019 for Communities in Bloom Outstanding Community Involvement Award, my bubble was burst. I was greeted with comments like "That's nice, who's he?" and "Why is that so great" But really.... C'mon people.... Do you really not know who Mark Cullen is?

Mark Cullen is our very own Canadian Garden Guru, a title that he really doesn't like as he feels he should not have the status of guru. My introduction to Mark was through his appearances on Canada AM in the 90's. As a young stay at home mom, I would watch the zany Jeff Hutchins and Mark on Friday mornings. He would instruct the inept Jeff on the basics of gardening all while kidding around and offering good sound advice. I have to say at this point in my life, I was not into gardening as much as I am now. Two things struck me about Mark. One was his masterful yet humble attitude and the second was his inclusion of the Prairie provinces and BC in his commentaries. He realized that viewers came from all across the country in varied zones, soil types and climates and that not all gardening practices were good for every region. Since that time I have followed his career through his involvement with Home Hardware as spokesman for Mark's Choice tools and equipment, usually during curling events.

Mark has hosted various radio programs in the Toronto area over the years, giving out sensible down home gardening advice. His ability to explain processes in the simplest terms and his extensive knowledge of all things gardening makes him a popular host. He is not formally trained but learned his craft at his father's side. His father started a garden centre and Mark grew up in the retail garden business. His son is now working with him on various aspects of the business.

The first time our local CiB group attended the National Conference in Ottawa was in 2013. At this conference we received Home Hardware's Volunteer Recognition award. Mark hosted that evening's event as well as the Town Hall Event the next day. As moderator of the Town Hall, Mark conducted a question and answer period. Questions from the floor on topics such as volunteer gathering and retention and municipal involvement in the program were fielded. He does a wonderful job keeping all the CiB participants in line while fostering new ideas and suggesting solutions to common problems.

The next time I saw him was at the CiB conference in Regina in 2016. Once again he was moderator of the Town Hall as well as promoting his new book [The New Canadian](#)

Gardener. This book is an encyclopedia of the latest gardening practices for the beginner and advanced gardener. One of the newest theories in it is to keep your garden “trash” throughout the winter to provide shelter for beneficial insects like lady bugs and bees. It also goes into the use of raised garden beds, which has become a popular practice here. A really good informative book.

It was during this conference that he spoke about his current passion, The Highway of Heroes Living Tribute. In Ontario there is a stretch of highway connecting CFB Trenton and the DonValley Parkway. It is on this stretch of highway that funeral processions for our fallen soldiers must travel on their way home. It is this group's mission to plant a tree for every fallen soldier since confederation, a total of 117,000 trees! What a noble undertaking! What an interesting guy!

Although he has national notoriety, he seems just like a down home kind of guy which makes him a very appealing speaker. Most of the time, I assume that someone from Toronto would have no idea about Maple Creek. But don't be fooled. He knows all about the underhanded practices of our local CiB committee and their tactics for gaining volunteers and the favour of council with wine and fancy parties. He has used our example in his presentations in the past!

So, on January 27, please join us virtually to listen to Mark Cullen speak on his latest topic *“Escape to Reality- How gardening is changing the world, and the world is changing gardening.”* Come and meet one of my heroes. Get your questions ready for him as there will be a live question and answer session. As well as all this, there will be door prizes and treats just like all past Soirees. Register at the Visitor Centre and don't let the virtual part scare you. We will be here to get you set up to enjoy our special Soiree, pandemic version. In the spirit of Maple Creek, I know we will not let the current situation keep us from carrying out our annual event. I know it is going to be a fun and informative evening! See you there!!!