

LOCAL

'Like I'm newly born': 54 new U.S. citizens sworn in at New England Botanic Garden

**Veer Mudambi**

Worcester Telegram & Gazette

Published 5:17 a.m. ET Aug. 31, 2023 | Updated 10:50 a.m. ET Aug. 31, 2023

BOYLSTON — It was raining outside, but spirits were high indoors as 54 newly minted American citizens and their families gathered Wednesday morning for a naturalization ceremony at the New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill in Boylston.

“I conduct many of these naturalizations during the year,” said Magistrate Judge David H. Hennessy. “It’s one of the best parts of my job.”

Initially planned for the outdoor garden area, the ceremony moved to the Orangerie room, a conservatory that houses the garden’s subtropical plants collection during the winter.

Nation of immigrants

Representatives from across the globe, and from every continent except Antarctica, were present.

“This is an important day for you, but also for the generations of families who will follow you as citizens of the United States,” said Hennessy. “I would not be standing before you as a United States magistrate judge if my great grandparents had not done what you do today, taking that important step to becoming citizens of the United States.”

Immigrants who have been lawful residents of the United States for three to five years can apply for citizenship.

What makes naturalization particularly special, said garden trustee Dr. James Karadimos, is that it requires a conscious decision.

“We understand your journey, the sacrifice, the pride and the purpose of these new Americans who are American by choice,” said Karadimos, a Westborough podiatrist who like

Hennessy is the child of immigrants himself.

For Inian Parthasarathy of Chelmsford, it has been a journey of over 20 years. He came to this country from India in 2000 and began the path to citizenship in 2003.

“It’s a great feeling, but now a new journey starts” as a citizen, he said.

Johanna Wallace of Lawrence and her sister came to watch their mother, Geovanis Trinidad De Flores, start that journey after a similar 20-year wait.

“I’m very excited,” said Wallace. “It’s been a long time waiting and I know it’s going to be a very memorable moment for my mom.”

The family is originally from the Dominican Republic.

Participating in democracy

Citizenship is not an ending so much as a beginning, Karadimos said, telling those assembled they “still have a demanding and rewarding task ahead of you and that is the hard work of active citizenship.”

Becoming an American citizen gives not only opportunity but a voice that can be heard at the ballot box and not only at the federal level in Washington, said Hennessy, but in choosing local representatives, school board members and even the criminal justice system.

“For it’s not the police, prosecutors or even judges like myself, who decide guilt and innocence,” he said, “but juries made up of citizens.”

Michael Denis Ssebugwawo of Acton had already been an active participant in his adopted country before today, affecting lives in his capacity as a social worker.

“I feel great, like I’m newly born,” said Ssebugwawo, who came here from Uganda seven years ago to escape political instability. “I’m proud to be an American now.”

The United States is not without its own issues, Karadimos pointed out.

“You’re certainly becoming Americans at a difficult, even frightening time in this country,” he said. “America is not well. America is losing its sense of its history as a nation of immigrants.

“And so, I task you to begin immediately to exercise your rights and raise your voice to help change America. With a shared commitment to basic human decency, it can be better.”

