

NEWS

'Diverse, just like a garden,' More than 40 people become U.S. citizens in Tower Hill ceremony

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Worcester Telegram & Gazette

Aug. 27, 2025, 4:27 p.m. ET

BOYLSTON — "As a nation we thrive because we are diverse, just like a garden," said Grace Elton, CEO of New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill, in her remarks at a naturalization ceremony.

Framed by the garden's rich variety of flowers, more than 40 participants from 23 different countries pledged their allegiance to the United States and received the certificates that make their citizenship official.

The naturalization ceremony on Wednesday, Aug. 27, was the fifth to be held at Tower Hill.

U.S. District Judge Margaret R. Guzman, who presided over the ceremony, echoed Elton in emphasizing the critical role immigrants plays in the country's success, recalling the story of her own father's journey to the United States from Mexico.

"There truly is no U.S. without these journeys," she said, addressing the newly minted citizens. "We are better and more whole today than we were yesterday because of you all."

Listening to the speeches, participants waved American flags, nibbled on matching American flag cookies and celebrated a day that had been long awaited.

New citizen

"It has been about 10 years to get here," said Leda Valente who first came to the United States from Brazil in 2014 to study accounting. "I just feel amazing today, it's been a long way to come."

The new citizens' joy also accompanied an eagerness to participate in the electoral process. While a green card, which many participants possessed prior to receiving their citizenship, grants permanent residency and working rights, only citizens can vote.

"I am excited to elect and vote as soon as I can and participate in my city elections," said Abhishek Ravada, a Worcester resident originally from India.

[The League of Women Voters of the Worcester Area](#), a nonpartisan advocacy group, seized the opportunity to get the new voters registered, stressing the importance of local elections in addition to state and federal ones.

"Voting is the best way to get involved and see the results of issues you care about, especially in local elections," said Alexandra Martin, a Worcester State University student in her first event with the organization. "It's where it all starts."

At the end of the event, the league shuffled happily through a stack of new voter applications.

The preliminary election in Worcester is Sept. 2.

The event is always accompanied by music. This year, Kelley Hollis, soprano, and Julia Scott Carey, piano, of Juventas New Music Ensemble sang the national anthem and other classics like "Over the Rainbow." Many people in the audience hummed along.

'Access to nature is a human right'

"It is really special to be in the presence of people who have made it to this point and made this commitment," said Carey.

Elton emphasized Tower Hill's mission to welcome all community members regardless of their background or immigration status.

"Access to nature is a human right — that means all humans," she said. "We are influenced by certain laws but the focus on creating a garden space that is beautiful and educational for every human will never change."