

New citizens celebrate with tears, smiles and song

Cheryl Makin, @CherylMakin

Published 3:01 p.m. ET April 3, 2017



(Photo: Cheryl Makin/Staff Photo)

PLAINFIELD – Tiago Rodrigues is looking forward to his next trip out of the United States — just so he can come back and officials can say "Welcome Home."

A newly naturalized U.S. citizen as of Saturday, the Portuguese-born Rodrigues, who has lived in America for 33 of his 34 years, said "as cheesy as it sounds," he has always been jealous that other members of his family were welcomed home after a trip abroad and he was not.

"Now it's my turn," he said with a smile, holding his daughter, Hailey. "I am looking forward to voting, to going to jury duty and being welcomed home."

READ: 35 new citizens sworn in at Kean's Liberty Hall Museum (/story/life/2016/07/03/35-new-citizens-sworn-keans-liberty-hall-museum/86351614/)

READ: DAR cares for Buccleuch Mansion (/story/news/local/outreach/caring-communities/2014/04/27/dar-cares-for-buccleuch-mansion/8050933/)

Read more articles and stay in touch with your local news by clicking [here \(http://offers.mycentraljersey.com/hnWNE\)](http://offers.mycentraljersey.com/hnWNE)

The Plainfield Public Library hosted an official naturalization ceremony Saturday in which 24 people from 14 countries took the oath of citizenship. The administration of the oath was given by Randi C. Borgen, Newark field office director of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

"This marks the final steps in your journey to American citizenship," said Paulo Correia, who is the Naturalization Section chief. "For more than 220 years, taking this oath has led to American citizenship. Some of the language we recite dates back to 1790 when the first naturalization laws were passed."

Having completed the necessary legal steps, including proof of English-language proficiency (unless exempted), a thorough interview and passing a written citizenship exam, the new citizens proudly proclaimed the U.S. as their own, waving flags, saying the pledge of allegiance, singing patriotic songs and even shedding some tears.

"Every year, one million immigrants come to this country from around the world to seek better lives for themselves and their families," Correia said.

Mostly, excitement was in the air before and after the moving ceremony.

[Fullscreen](#)

"It's been a long time coming. This is such a good feeling," said Luz Murillo, who admitted that she cried with tears of joy when she became a citizen. Her fellow new citizens, Murillo was joined by family members — all equally proud of this important step. New citizens celebrated at Plainfield Public Library. Jessica Ortega, and son, Kenneth Rojas.

Originally from Poland, husband and wife Leszek Studzinski and Jadwiga Studzinska of Linden were joined on their special day by their daughter, Paula Salerno, who became a citizen when she turned 18. Having been in the country since 1996, the couple has been "looking forward to this day for a long time," Salerno said.

"She is very happy that she is finally a U.S. citizen," Salerno said. "He is equally excited."



Originally from Colombia, Luz Morales of Rahway takes the oath of citizenship to become a U.S. citizen. The Plainfield Public Library hosted an official naturalization ceremony Saturday that saw 24 people from 14 different countries taking the oath of citizenship. (Photo: Cheryl Makin/Staff Photo)

"Now everybody in my family is a citizen," said Maximino Islas, who came from Mexico 20 years ago and lives in South Plainfield. "There is more opportunity here. This is good. I am excited."

Waving an American flag and with a huge smile, David Bereyra of Hillside felt he was making his children proud.

"This is good," said Bereyra, who is from the Dominican Republic. "Now I am a citizen same as them. I am feeling very good. I am so happy. I've waited a long time for this — 33 years."

Jaymima Patel of Union has been in the U.S. for 36 years. She said the excitement of this milestone extended to her four children, who are citizens.

"My son gave me a lecture about my new responsibilities this morning," said Patel, who was born in Kenya and raised in the United Kingdom. "He said I now have to vote and do things for the United States of America. I have lived on four continents but made America my home. That was always my father's wish — to come to America and become a citizen."

Karla Rodriguez came from El Salvador when she was 4. Becoming a citizen competes a dream for the Elizabeth resident.

"My mother, brother and me all wanted to become citizens," Rodriguez said. "My brother did already and now it's my turn. My mother is next. I am very excited. It means everything. This is the land of the free, and I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. I love this country."

Noting the current anti-immigration climate of the Trump administration, Rodriguez admits that her mother is nervous and will likely remain that way until her own citizenship becomes official.

"She is doing everything that needs to be done, but until she is at her own ceremony, she will be nervous," Rodriguez said.



Originally from Mexico, Maximino Islas of South Plainfield is congratulated on becoming a U.S. citizen by DAR member Gayle Loftis. The Plainfield Public Library hosted an official naturalization ceremony Saturday that saw 24 people from 14 different countries taking the oath of citizenship. (Photo: Cheryl Makin/Staff Photo)

Before the last video presentation of and singing to "America The Beautiful," Dana Duncanson, senior library assistant of the Plainfield Public Library, shared her own citizenship experience. A native of the Bahamas, Duncanson never intended to give up her Bahamaian citizenship, visiting her "home" every summer.

"My plan was always to go home to Nassau — yes, that was home for me," said Duncanson, who was raised in the U.S. since age 9. "Everybody would ask me when I would become a citizen. I thought about how would it feel to be a citizen of America. President Obama — he inspired me to become a citizen. I became a citizen two years ago. And now I feel a sense of belonging to a country — America. I can vote now. I have all the opportunities every citizen has in this country, and guess what, I encouraged some of my siblings to become a citizen here in America."

The Westfield Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) welcomed the new Americans with gift bags that contained a copy of the Constitution, pencils, flag, pinwheel and a bookmark listing U.S. presidents. Morristown DAR member Pat Sanftner came dressed in Revolutionary-era garb, adding a historical perspective to the experience.

"Naturalizations are the best," Sanftner said. "They worked hard to be here and are thrilled. This is a big dream. I've seen quite a few in the last seven or so years and everyone is so joyful to be here."

Staff Writer Cheryl Makin: 732-565-7256; cmakin@mycentraljersey.com

Don't miss a thing



Download our apps and get alerts for local news, weather, traffic and more. Search "MyCentralJersey" in your app store or use these links from your device: [iPhone app \(https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/my-central-jersey/id520557512?mt=8\)](https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/my-central-jersey/id520557512?mt=8) | [Android app for phone and tablet \(https://play.google.com/store](https://play.google.com/store)

[/apps/details?id=com.gannett.local.library.news.mycentraljersey\)](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.gannett.local.library.news.mycentraljersey) | [iPad app \(https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/my-central-jersey/id520557512?mt=8\)](https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/my-central-jersey/id520557512?mt=8) Don't forget to 'like' us on Facebook! (<https://www.facebook.com/MyCentralJersey>)

Read or Share this story: <http://mycj.co/2nBAyBH>

