



Red Hill Hosts Citizenship Celebration



Natives of other countries take the oath of citizenship at Patrick Henry's Red Hill in early May. America welcomed 30 new citizens at the annual Naturalization Ceremony.

Editor's note: Southside Electric Cooperative is a supporter and sponsor of many annual events at Patrick Henry's Red Hill. The Cooperative has about 3,700 members in Charlotte County, and wishes to congratulate the 30 new American citizens who were recently naturalized.

Natives of 18 different countries became citizens of the United States in early May at the last home and burial place of an American patriot who delivered famous words about freedom.

In a May 6 Naturalization Ceremony at Patrick Henry's Red Hill in Charlotte County, 30 individuals originally from other countries took their oath of citizenship, pledging to "support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic."

After administering the oath during what was an actual court proceeding, United States District Judge Norman K. Moon welcomed the new citizens, telling them, "You have honored the United States by selecting it as your new country." The 30 new Americans were seated in front of him in the Patrick Henry Family Services gymnasium. The citizenship ceremony was moved inside because of rainy weather.

"We admire and respect the hard work, sacrifice and determination to become an American citizen. This is a defining moment in your life, and we are grateful to be a part of it," Scott Brown, president and chief executive officer of the Patrick Henry Memorial Foundation, said in his opening remarks.

People the world over come to the United States wanting to become American citizens to join family, have a better quality of life, or escape persecution. They arrive enthusiastic about gaining the freedoms that America was founded upon. Patrick Henry's impassioned plea of "Give me liberty or give me death!" has endured as a cry for freedom for those coming to America. Among the many questions citizenship applicants may actually be tested on is who uttered those famous words.

The new citizens at Red Hill were natives of Mexico, China, the Philippines, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Pakistan, Iran, Kenya, Morocco, Japan, Italy, Uruguay, Ethiopia, Nepal, Haiti, Romania, Russia and India.

Disha Ankur Brahmabhatt came to the United States in 2010 from India. She and husband Ankur, who became a citizen in 2012, are in the hotel business in South Boston.

"It's very exciting," Brahmabhatt said about becoming a citizen. A big smile spread across her face. Asked what she liked best about America, she said freedom and no restrictions on what she does and how she worships.

"This is the land of opportunity," her husband added. "When you work hard, it pays off."

Uruguay native Silvana Andrea Miller came to the United States in 2003 "for a better life," specifically more career opportunities. She teaches Spanish and English as a Second Language in area schools. She also owns a language school in Danville, teaching six languages and providing translation services, and has plans to open a bakery that offers Uruguayan desserts.

"I want to have the privilege of voting. I want to be a part of the nation," Miller said about becoming a citizen now.

Grace Avance Plaster, a native of the Philippines who arrived in America in 2007, said her 8-year-old daughter, Angel Faith, urged her to become a citizen to make sure her mom would always be able to stay in the United States.

"I'm so proud to be an American," said Plaster, a registered nurse in Patrick County.

Antonio Ojodeagua, a native of Mexico, became a citizen at Poplar Forest in Bedford County in April after being in America 25 years. He said the process to citizenship involved paperwork, interviews and first gaining permanent residency. He hired an attorney to help with the process.

His wife, Ashley, said getting through the process and becoming a citizen takes away any worry that her husband's permanent residency card could be revoked and that he would be sent back to Mexico.

They were there with their two sons to see Antonio's brother, Jesus, become a citizen.



Del. T. Scott Garrett urges the new citizens to get involved in their communities.

The new Americans, who said The Pledge of Allegiance, sang “The Star-Spangled Banner” and received small flags, also received advice on becoming good citizens.

“Your new country needs your participation, your energy, your labor, your intelligence, your wisdom, and, above all, your love and devotion,” Moon said.

Del. T. Scott Garrett, whose 23rd District includes parts of Amherst and Bedford counties and Lynchburg, urged the new citizens to be kind, generous and caring. He told them to be bold, reverent, have principles, get involved in their communities and exercise their right to vote.

“Remember, your present is not your final destiny. The best is yet to come,” Garrett added.

This was the 11th annual Naturalization Ceremony hosted by Patrick Henry’s Red Hill.

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