

Naturalization on Independence Day



[James Johnson](#), Staff writer 8:48 p.m. EDT July 4, 2015

Chief United States District Judge Frank P. Geraci Jr., leads a naturalization ceremony for a group of 30 people from 16 different countries at the Genesee Country Village & Museum on July 4, 2015. (Photo: Annette Lein/@bikebizzle, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER)



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The road to becoming a pharmacist is long, sometimes uphill, and Shams Abdullah Al-Shalchi understands that.

Maybe Al-Shalchi could reach the goal in her native country of Iraq. Or maybe not, because of barriers thrown up by war, politics or what is considered acceptable and unacceptable, simply based on a family's background.

There is no guarantee in the United States or Iraq that Al-Shalchi will reach her goal. Yet, one of the reasons Al-Shalchi decided to become an American citizen as she obtains an education is the barriers here in the United States appear less formidable, movable in some cases.

"It's pretty cool because you have freedom," the 21-year-old student at Monroe Community College said. "That's the first thing you have to think about when you go to any country.

"You have education. You have family. You have friends. I know it's kind of crazy, but you have to be away from that (to appreciate or miss those things)."

Shams Abdullah Al-Shalchi

"Also you have safety. You have education. You have family. You have friends. I know it's kind of crazy, but you have to be away from that (to appreciate or miss those things)."

Al-Shalchi was one of 30 candidates who took their final steps to citizenship on Independence Day during a ceremony at Genesee Country Village & Museum in Mumford.

The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services work with men and women who apply for naturalization. Requirements are based on age, marital status and connections to military service.

Candidates in general, must be at least 18 years old, owner of a green card that proves legal and permanent residency for at least five years in the United States, plus on a smaller scale, have a grasp of the English language, the country's history and government structure.

Chief United States District Judge Frank Geraci Jr. administered the Oath of Allegiance.

"You each bear a responsibility to assure that liberty and justice prevail for all," Geraci said during remarks. "You now earn the right to vote, with that right, your responsibility to register to vote, and exercise that right intelligently.

"Read about issues of interest. Learn about who your government officials are."



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From left, Duaa Abdullah, Shams Abdullah and Alaa Abdullah raise their hands as they take the Oath of Allegiance to become naturalized American citizens in a ceremony Saturday at the Genesee Country Village & Museum. The women are all from Iraq. (Photo: Annette Lein/@bikebizzle/ / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER)

Iskander and Raila Lomidze Akhmedzhanov, a married couple from Russia, give two small thumbs up so far, for how government operates here. They count here, Turkish heritage and all. It is not uncommon for people who are not Russian to be passed over when it comes to receiving passports and other important documents, they said.

"Basically, you are living like a nobody," Iskander Akhmedzhanov said.

The couple says older relatives have been among those ordered out of and to the next region by Russian and Soviet governments since at least World War I. Georgia to Uzbekistan to the Ukraine to Russia. And not all neighbors have been welcoming.

"We are Muslim," Raila Lomidze Akhmedzhanov said. "They didn't like our religion, our culture, the way we dress. It's not everywhere but especially in that region near the Black Sea.

"It's not like here. You couldn't get married, because of no passport. You couldn't go to college, because you didn't have papers."

"I've lived here for most of my life, so this is home. I had to do it, there's no doubt in my mind. Now I can even run for political office."

Rodney Tull, West
Henrietta

The Akhmedzhanovs followed relatives here, and are among 6.6 million welcomed by the USCIS during the last 10 years.

While Iskander Akhmedzhanov walked around with an American flag in the breast pocket of his shirt, others from Barbados, Bhutan, Congo, Cuba, India and even Canada stepped forward when their names were called to accept their certificates in front of about 100 onlookers.

"I've lived here for most of my life, so this is home," said Henrietta resident Rodney Tull, 47. "I had to do it, there's no doubt in my mind. Now I can even run for political office.

"Both of my parents live here, they moved from Barbados during the 70s and 80s. Then finally it was time for my mom to send for her kids, you know a better life, more opportunities. It's great. Look at what I've accomplished. A decent job for 22 years (as a mail carrier), your own home."

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Lidwine Botelli, left, and Rosalie Mapana Moueme listen during their naturalization ceremony to become American citizens Saturday. The women are from Congo. (Photo: Annette Lein/@bikebizzle// STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER)