



## Cheers, tears part of naturalization ceremonies

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Ayoko Assiongbon and Alihoevi Messan, natives of Togo, had their own big cheering section to congratulate them on becoming American citizens Friday.

A contingent of about 20 people from the Vermont Street United Methodist Church in Quincy came to watch Nathalie and Justin — as they are known to their friends — take the oath from U.S. District Court Clerk Pamela Robinson at the naturalization ceremony at the Old Capitol State Historic Site.

The couple from Togo have been in the U.S. about six years and came to Quincy about 3 1/2 years ago — with Nathalie pregnant with twins. They have been more or less adopted by church members.

Jim and Karen Weede functioned as their American family, but the two “have been part of many people’s lives,” said Suzi Duker, one of the church members. The church participated in building a Habitat for Humanity home for the couple.

Now that they are citizens, their oldest son, now 13, can come to the United States from Togo, Karen Weede said.

“Nathalie basically won the lottery in Togo to get into this country,” she said.

Alma Van Dyke, a native of the Philippines, has been in the United States five years, but still got emotional during the ceremony.

“I saw a tear or two run down her cheek,” said her husband, Dick Van Dyke.

For Nnenna Dettro of Chatham, whose husband, Doyle, frequently travels abroad for his job, becoming a citizen means she won’t have to apply for a visa to travel with her husband.

“That’s the biggest modern benefit — to be able to have an American passport,” her husband said.

And what about the ceremony itself — which featured Lincoln scholar and author Michael Burlingame as the guest speaker — will Nnenna remember?

“Everything about it was special,” she said.

Burlingame, Naomi Lynn Distinguished Professor in Lincoln Studies at the University of Illinois Springfield and winner of the Lincoln prize for his book “Abraham Lincoln: A Life,” talked about Abraham Lincoln’s thoughts and writings about immigration and the U.S.

“His life story inspired me, and I hope it also inspires you,” Burlingame told the 60-plus new citizens, who represented 27 countries.

U.S. Judge Jeanne Scott said she often refers to the people who became citizens at ceremonies over which she presided as “my Americans.”

“I urge you to register to vote and to apply for a Social Security card,” she said.

“I look forward to seeing you on the streets of Springfield, or at the grocery store or in church and to learn of your future accomplishments.

“The rest of us are enriched by your presence here as citizens,” Scott said.

Chris Dettro can be reached at 788-1510.

### **New citizens**

People who became U.S. citizens during Friday’s ceremony, listed by city of residence, with their native country following the names:

From Springfield: Terence Purcell, Australia; Maribel Mueller, Peru; Yang Tian and Jinyan Chen, both of the People’s Republic of China; Mohammad Syed, Pakistan; Valeria Paz Nomura, Bolivia; Maria Avery, Colombia; Sonia Kline, United Kingdom; Tatiana Davis, Russia; Tra My Thi Phan, Vietnam; Ludmila Schildman, Slovakia; Lakshmi Paruchuri, India; Vladimir Lytchakov and Elena Samoilova, both of the USSR; Diego Ruiz Galarreta and Maria Ruiz, both of Peru; Olushola Famuwagun, Nigeria; Henrik Rasmussen, Denmark; Mastan Paidela, India; Juan Zurita, Ecuador; Twin Thongyoo, Thailand; Marlene Moss-Martin, Guatemala; Rene Troppa, Germany; Joy Agobe, Nigeria.

Bloomington: Harini and Sunil Sagi, both of India; Angelica Patino, Mexico; Zed Jawad Safar, Kuwait; Geetha Somasundaram, Somasundaram Narayanan, Janardhana Gorusu, Sangita Patel, Gautam Karandikar, Rejitha Namadurai, Ezhil Namadurai, Bokkasam Shiv Prasad, Padmini Shiv Prasad, Vish Rao Deeduvanu and Ananth V. Chilakamari, all of India.

Bunker Hill: Tatiana Emshousen, Ukraine.

Atlanta: Eduard Reinhardt, Germany.

Taylorville: Roopesh Patel, India.

Decatur: Ayaz Ahamed, India.

Carlville: Laura Zucca, Italy.

Quincy: Loay N. Ghannam, Syria; Wu Lin, China; Ayoko Assiongbon and Alihoevi Messan, both of Togo.

Beardstown: Kokou Hova, Togo; Rakibou Ouro Bagna, Togo; Virginia Diaz, Mexico.

Chatham: Nnenna Dettro, Nigeria; Julio Copello and Susana Puppio de Copello, both of Argentina.

Forsyth: Muhammad Khan, Kuwait; Farah Mahmood, United Kingdom; Nasima Kureishy, India.

Normal: Kaiping Ralston, People's Republic of China.

Clinton: Norman Loewen, Canada.

Rushville: Kodjo Amedanou, Togo.

Sherman: Alma Van Dyke, Philippines.

Shelbyville: Eunice Rincker, Canada

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booklady

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Congratulations to all of them! I hope they use this citizenship wisely. Get involved. Be sure to vote! Make your voice heard. We have the honor of being able to say what we think, vote for who we want and do not fear reprisals.

trueconservative

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I love reading these stories. Congrats to all. I still can't believe that ANYONE would want to come and live here considering how horrible the liberals think we are. (sarcasm) This goes to show what people will do to live in the land of the free. People here who criticize our policies should live in some of the countries listed above and see how they like it.

Early Bird

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Trueconservative-Couldn't have said it better myself! Thank you. Congratulations to the new citizens, America is a great country!

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