

Family of Six Becomes U.S. Citizens Together

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HARTFORD — Dozens of American flags waved in the crowd of 64 newly naturalized citizens packed into Courtroom 3 of Hartford's federal building Friday.

Of all of them, the Syed family wore the brightest smiles. All six — two sons, three daughters and their mother — gathered around Judge Robert Chatigny for a photograph after being sworn in as U.S. citizens.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Chatigny announced, "I present the citizens Syed."

The family's citizenship was the personal project of the oldest son, Saqlain, who immigrated to the U.S. from Pakistan with his family in May of 2008. After earning a degree at Central Connecticut State University, he went to work for Travelers Insurance with one goal in mind — earning the \$5,000 needed to pay the application fees and other expenses to naturalize his family.

Saqlain achieved not only that, but he also paid for his family's passports and citizenship applications.

"I actually just received more good news, too," he said Friday, grinning widely and gesturing at his phone. "My manager just texted me, and I got an extension for my job."

The family's father, Misbah, is still awaiting the processing of his citizenship application and hopes to be naturalized soon. He attended Friday's ceremony to support his wife and children.

Friends joined the family for the ceremony, among them April Adams of the Hartford Public Library, who spent three months volunteering to assist Nailah, their mother, with studying for her citizenship test.

"She worked really hard, getting up at 4:30 a.m. to study," Adams said. "Not only did Nailah pass, but she also didn't mess up any of the questions."

Saqlain, along with Nailah, his sisters Nimrah, Momiza, and Moniza, as well as his brother Saleh, all changed their names upon becoming citizens. Saqlain said that for religious reasons, their surname, Syed, would usually come before their first names. The family changed their name to the "American style," reversing the first and last names, so as to prevent confusion.

Sixteen of the 64 naturalized citizens also changed their names. They immigrated from a range of countries, including Afghanistan, Brazil, the Republic of Macedonia, Romania and Somalia.

Chatigny, who joked that he doesn't usually see so many smiling faces in his courtroom, mentioned during the ceremony several famous naturalized citizens and their accomplishments. He spoke of scientist Albert Einstein, inventor Alexander Bell, and former Secretary of State Madeline Albright.

"In becoming citizens, you're enriching our country with your unique personalities and gifts," he said.

Chatigny stressed the importance of America's foundation as a country of immigrants, and welcomed the naturalized citizens to what he called the American family.

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