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QuickTakes!

Historic Kean University Celebrates Immigrants as They Make History as New Citizens

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At historic Liberty Hall Museum at Kean University, 33 new Americans made history of their own, taking their Oath of Allegiance at a U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' naturalization ceremony on Tuesday, June 20. The new citizens come from 18 countries across five continents – Africa, Asia, Europe, North America and South America.

Kean President Dawood Farahi, PhD, welcomed the soon-to-be-American-citizens to the University, calling them “beautiful people from beautiful parts of the world” as he recalled his own story as a naturalized U.S. citizen from Afghanistan.

“I was sitting in the same seat as you are in 1976,” he said to warm applause. “You will never be disappointed in being an American.”

John Kean, the president of Liberty Hall Museum at Kean University, gave a brief overview of the history of the mansion, the 245-year-old home of New Jersey’s first-elected governor William Livingston. He noted that several presidents, including George Washington on his way to his first inauguration in New York City, visited Liberty Hall.

“William Livingston called it Liberty Hall to mark and commemorate the freedom that America enjoyed when freed from English rule,” Mr. Kean said.

The entire ceremony felt like a homecoming to 20-year-old Laurent Gutierrez from Elizabeth, a Kean University student originally from Cuba, who is the first in her family to become a citizen.

“It is exciting to be sworn in at Liberty Hall Museum. It feels like home because I study here,” Ms. Gutierrez said. “It was moving to me. I was crying at some points in the ceremony.” The architecture and art history double major said becoming a citizen connects her to the U.S., which has given her opportunities that she did not have in her native country. “I would not have been able to study the thing I wanted to study the most in my country,” she said.

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U.S. Congressman Albio Sires, the keynote speaker at the ceremony and a naturalized citizen from Cuba, encouraged the new Americans to claim all the rights and privileges of citizenship. "Now the work begins," Congressman Sires said. "You are now a participant in this great country. Your vote is the same as everybody else's. People have died for that privilege. People die in other countries because they can't vote."

Kean University Board of Trustees President Ada Morell spoke from personal experience about the joy, pride and excitement in becoming a U.S. citizen, and told the new Americans to weave their stories into the great, diverse American tapestry. "You will follow in the footsteps of millions of immigrants who came before you, who came to the United States seeking prosperity and opportunity, and you will leave today as an important player in the history of this great country," Ms. Morell said.

Kean alumnus Mathew Tartza, Class of 2017 from Sayreville, who studied music education and voice, sang the *National Anthem* and *America the Beautiful* at the event to the new citizens, who were born in the following countries: Argentina (1); Brazil (1); China (1); Columbia (5); Cuba (4); Dominican Republic (1); Ecuador (1); Ethiopia (1); Haiti (1); India (2); Jamaica (2); Jordan (1); Mexico (1); Peru (3); Portugal (3); Taiwan (1); United Kingdom (1); and Uruguay (3).