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City celebrates 192 newly naturalized citizens

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The city recognized about 200 recently naturalized U.S. citizens Tuesday, September 10, 2019, during a ceremony at Sloan Convention Center. (Bac Totrong/photo@bgdailynews.com)

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Bac Totrong/Daily News

Ten years ago, Ko Pay and Wah Paw escaped the world's longest running civil war in Myanmar and resettled into the United States. They officially became U.S. citizens last month.

“I feel like this is my country,” said Pay, who now has four young children in Bowling Green. “These are my people.”

On Tuesday, the city of Bowling Green recognized Pay, Paw and 189 other people representing 18 countries who became naturalized citizens in the past 12 months during a reception at Sloan Convention Center.

“We’ve done this several years in a row now, and the city feels it’s important to recognize those individuals who have gone through the work to become a U.S. citizen,” Mayor Bruce Wilkerson said. “They want to be part of our community and want to be part of a nation, and we want that.”

Leyda Becker, international communities liaison for the city of Bowling Green, advised the new citizens about the upcoming U.S. census, elections and the possibilities to work for the city – and encouraged connection with her office.

“With great freedom comes great responsibility,” Becker said. “One of the most important rights you now have is the ability to vote.”

During the ceremony, she announced the new citizens’ names and directed them to a personalized certificate and photo with Wilkerson and Bowling Green City Commissioners Sue Parrigin, Brian “Slim” Nash and Dana Beasley-Brown.

There were individuals, families and a lot of smiles.

Lebon Dauda and Florence Dauda officially became citizens two weeks ago. The couple fled violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo six years ago.

“We didn’t want to,” Lebon Dauda said of the experience, as most of his family remains in the green, mountainous and primate-filled land. He’s able to email and call them, but it’s been challenging to arrange a visit – there’s currently a travel advisory warning about crime and civil unrest, according to the U.S. State Department.

But despite these obstacles, they’ve decided to make the best of their situation. “We are also proud to be here,” said Lebon Dauda, who enjoys Bowling Green’s people and neighborhood feel.

He complimented the city and Becker, in particular. “We are all successful because of her,” he said.



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Michael Trivizadakis, a leadership consultant, instructor at Western Kentucky University and a new citizen, grew up without electricity in a small village in Greece. He eventually expanded his horizons by living in other places for school and work.

“Wherever I go, I try to make it a home and establish a connection,” Trivizadakis told the crowd during the ceremony.

After finishing his Ph.D., he moved to Philadelphia to work in a laboratory. Outside of work, he remained within the local Greek community and didn’t feel like he connected with the greater community, he said.

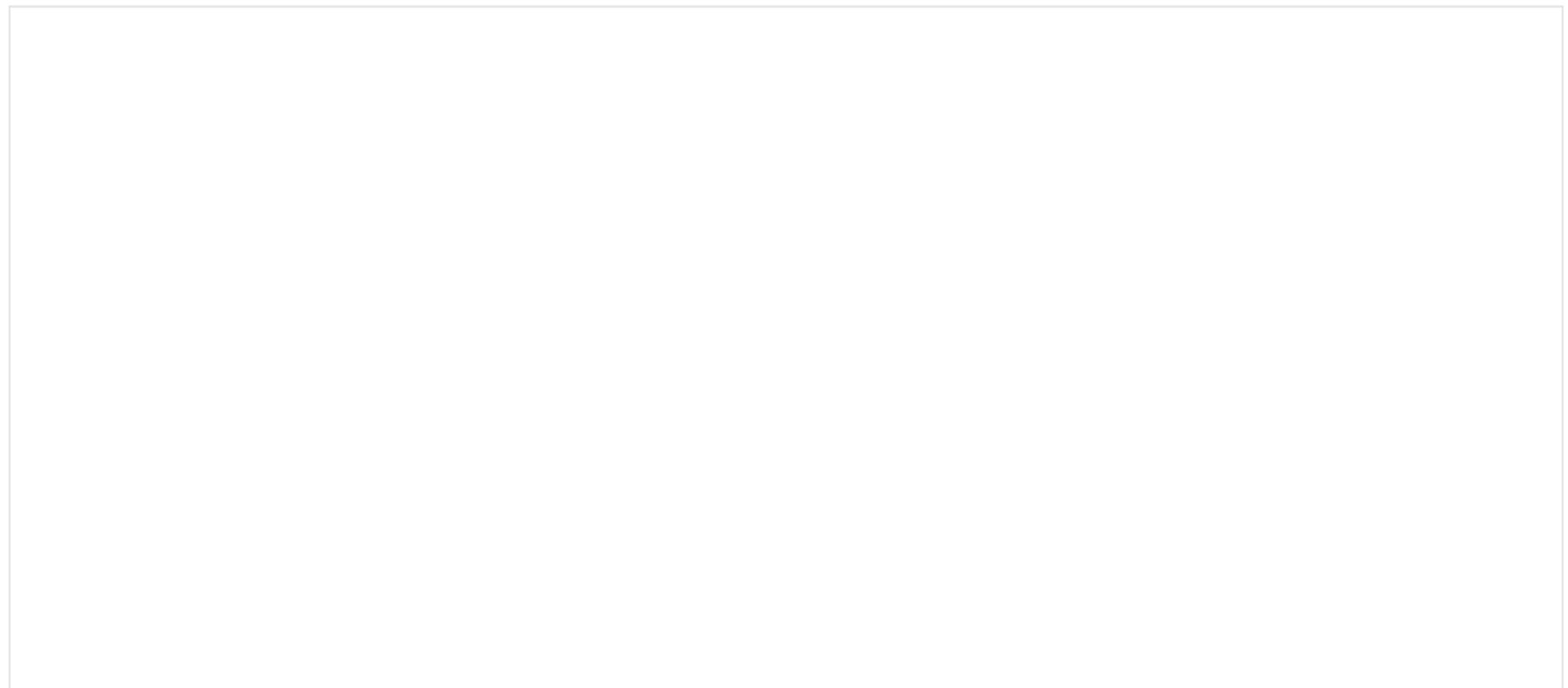
“Looking back, I realized I was afraid of getting out of my comfort zone,” he said.

Then he moved to Bowling Green and began focusing on raising his two daughters and establishing connections with his neighbors. He was able to create roots and become involved with the local international community.

“All of us make this place special,” Trivizadakis said. “I still feel that I belong in Greece, but today, I am proud to call Bowling Green home.”

– Follow reporter Caroline Eggers on Twitter @eggersdailynews or visit bgdailynews.com.

MORE INFORMATION





City to celebrate newest naturalized citizens in special ceremony

0:31 VIDEO: 5th annual "Reception for New Americans" recognizes 192 new citizens from nearly 20 countries

Caroline Eggers

News reporter.

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