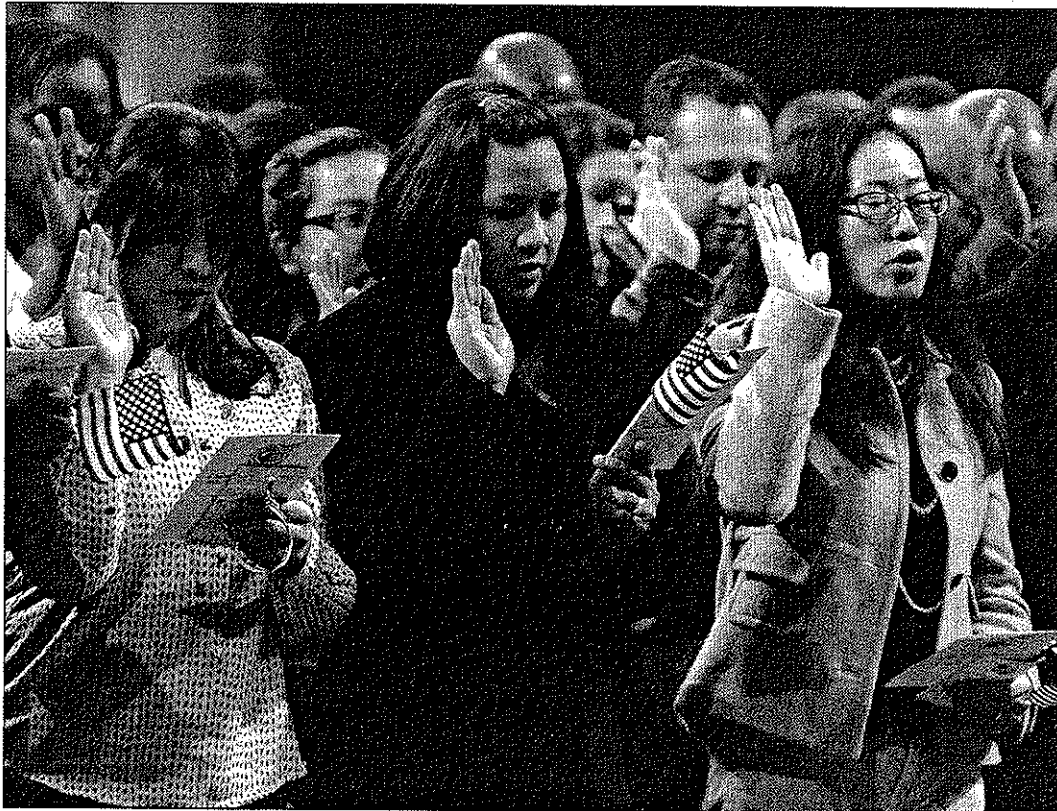


Speaker touts Kansas to new U.S. citizens

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Dave Williams/Eagle correspond

New citizens take the oath of citizenship at a Celebration of Citizenship ceremony Monday evening at Intrust Bank Arena.

State a place where 'dreams come home'

BY BECCY TANNER
The Wichita Eagle

As a child growing up in India and whose father was a student at the University of Kansas, Neeli Bendapudi believed the United States was a place of opportunity.

But Kansas, based on the small KU mascot her father sent her, was "a place where birds wore shoes," said Bendapudi, now dean of the University of Kansas School of Business.

She was the featured speaker Monday night at Intrust Bank Arena, where about 400 people gathered to witness nearly 90 people from 36 countries become naturalized citizens of the United States.

The event was sponsored by the Rotary Club of Wichita as a way to increase public awareness of citizenship.

One of the people who took the oath of citizenship Monday night

was "Andie" Nghi Boi Lam from Vietnam. She said she came to the United States in 1998 and now, at 24, is a U.S. citizen.

"I wanted to be a citizen to be able to compete and put myself in the global market," said Nghi Boi Lam, who is a financial analyst for Learjet. "As a Vietnamese citizen, I wasn't able to do any governmental work. It limited my opportunity."

She said she is proud of now being a U.S. citizen.

"The first thing I can tell people is that I am no longer an alien," she said. "It is an awkward conversation to have with someone."

Monday's event was presided over by Judge Eric Melgren and included the McConnell Air Force Honor Guard and the Wichita East Madrigals and Philharmonia. The office of U.S. Rep. Mike Pompeo, R-Wichita, provided pocket Constitutions for those in attendance as well as the new citizens.

KU's Bendapudi talked about her early impressions of the United States gleaned from her father.

"I did not know what America was, whether it was a country or continent," Bendapudi said. "But I remember Kansas was somewhere you went to help your family, to make your dreams come home."

"My father, for three and a half

years, we did not see him. We did not have a telephone ... When he came back, he told us how unbelievable, how kind, how generous Americans were."

Bendapudi said her own story mirrors her father's. She also came to the United States, worked hard and attended KU.

"We flew the American flag proudly from Day One," she said.

"We knew citizenship would come. We were just waiting for this country to adopt us back."

It was fitting, Bendapudi told the audience, that the new citizens were Kansans who already knew the meaning of the state motto "Ad Astra Per Aspera," which translates to "To the Stars Through Difficulties."

"What else better embodies immigration?" she said.

"I love the spirit because it is realistic. We know there will be difficulties. But it is also optimistic because we know we are headed for the stars."

"I hope you take with great pride that you are citizens of the United States and that you live in Kansas, the greatest state that we have."

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the plane is a Gulfstream that departed from Bend (Kan.) Municipal and crashed 10 miles from John C. Tune Airport in Nashville at around 5 p.m. According to the flight-tracking website FlightAware, the plane traveled from E. Page Municipal in Oklahoma City to Bend around midday, heading for Nashville. The plane is registered to an aerial company located outside Great Bend.

Associated Press

Accused in rape case is not guilty

A suspect facing seven charges in the rape of a 27-year-old woman last year made his first appearance in court Monday. Prosecutor Redmon, who argued the case when the rape occurred, entered a not guilty plea on all charges, and District Judge Joseph Bribiesca ruled a March 31 jury verdict set Redmon's bail at \$250,000. Redmon was arrested after protesters broke into the woman's home near Lincoln and George Washington Boulevard on June 7. The woman testified at a hearing in August that her rapist held a gun to her head and threatened to shoot and kill her if she did not comply. The woman was unable to identify her attacker, but a police officer said her DNA test showed Redmon's underwear was on her.

Laviana

Underway in slaying of former football player

A selection got underway in the first-degree murder trial of one of three suspects in the March 31 slaying of former South High football player Jordan Turner. Joseph Wright, 21, is on trial before District Judge Joseph Bribiesca. The former discovered Turner's body on a cotton field near 127th Street East, and investigators later said the suspect had been shot at the scene. Wright testified at a preliminary hearing that he recognized Wright after one of the suspects accused Turner of slaying her.

Laviana

Prosecutors rest case in slaying of throat-cutting suspect

Prosecutors rested their case in the first-degree murder trial of a suspect in the 2012, death of a man whose throat was slashed in his home at 830 S. Erie. The defendant, Jerry Thach,