



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

White House Recognizes Welcoming America Champions of Change
(www.whitehouse.gov/champions/welcoming-america)

**Immigrants Want to Contribute; White House Recognizes Leaders Who are Helping their Communities
Seize that Potential During National Welcoming Week**

(Washington, D.C.) September 18, 2013 – As the debate in Washington on immigration moves forward, local community leaders across the country are recognizing that immigrants make us stronger and are working in their communities to create welcoming climates that harness the economic and social potential that newcomers bring.

This Thursday, September 19th, the White House will recognize ten individuals and their innovative efforts to lift up newcomer contributions and involve the whole community in supporting successful immigrant integration. **Ten Welcoming America Champions of Change will be honored in an event that will be streamed live starting at 1pm EST at www.whitehouse.gov/live.**

The Welcoming America Champions of Change include local leaders from across the country whose cutting edge initiatives – from Nashville to Detroit – demonstrate the growing interest among local communities to ensure that everyone – including immigrants – have the opportunity to contribute and succeed. As the country is reshaped by demographic change, these leaders offer a fresh vision for how communities can make the most of their diversity. Visit www.whitehouse.gov/champions/welcoming-america for a list of the Champions and their bios.

Says Welcoming America Executive Director David Lubell, “At a crucial moment in our history, the Welcoming America Champions of Change serve as a model for what we can achieve when we recognize the tremendous contributions that immigrants make to the social and economic fabric of American communities. These champions are innovators who are building stronger communities by helping newcomers succeed, and inviting longer-term residents to contribute to and share in that success. “

Welcoming America Champions of Change are being recognized for their pioneering practices to advance immigrant inclusion in ways that involve U.S.-born residents and the community as a whole.

The Champions are being honored by the White House during **National Welcoming Week**, a nationwide event taking place September 15th-22nd with more than 100 events across the country that underscore the contributions of immigrants to local cultural and economic life. From a [proclamation](#) signed by Michigan Governor Rick Snyder recognizing that immigrants are key to prosperity and innovation in the state to [volunteer activities](#) in Alabama that bring together foreign and U.S.-born North Carolinians to give back to the communities, to a gathering of hundreds in Nashville to nosh at [diverse local restaurants](#), groups across the country are celebrating how immigrants enrich their communities. Hosted by Welcoming America and its partners, more information is available at www.welcomingweek.org.

About the Champions

Kasar S. Abdulla, Former Director of Welcoming Tennessee Initiative (a project of the Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition)

Nashville, TN

For the past 17 years, Kasar Abdulla has made a tremendous impact on communities throughout Tennessee as an educator, advocate, organizer, and facilitator of issues concerning New Americans and receiving community members. One of the founding members of the Welcoming Tennessee Initiative (WTI), the model for all subsequent welcoming initiatives, Kasar continues to cultivate an environment for community members to address difficult issues such as immigration and religious understanding through dialogue in order to build strong communities and lift up diversity as one of Tennessee's greatest strengths. Kasar, a native of Kurdistan, is one of Nashville's most well-known and respected community leaders and truly embodies the values of cross-cultural understanding and community leadership.

Al Heggins, Human Relations Director, City of High Point

High Point, NC

Al Heggins, M.Ed., serves as the City of High Point Human Relations Director. Al had a vision for High Point Human Relations: an equitable & inclusive community. She designed & implemented three programs to jumpstart this effort: affirmative fair housing, the High Point Student Human Relations Commission, and intensive educational outreach about City services and civic engagement opportunities. Al's department later applied & was selected by UNC's Institute for the Study of the Americas and the Latino Migration Project for the Building Integrated Communities (BIC) initiative; BIC's best practices and research based approach to transforming municipalities and counties into equitable and inclusive communities aligned perfectly with her vision. Supported by BIC, Human Relations convened a series of community focus groups comprised of immigrants and non-immigrants; culminating into a 16-point strategic plan to seamlessly integrate its culturally diverse residents. The launch of this plan added two working committees under the City's Human Relations Commission (the Interfaith Affairs Committee and the International Advisory Committee) and sparked a partnership with the national Welcoming Cities and Counties Initiative.

Adolfo Hernandez, Director of the Office of New Americans

Chicago, IL

Adolfo Hernandez serves as the Director of Chicago's Office of New Americans (ONA). Launched by Mayor Rahm Emanuel in 2011, the Office of New Americans is dedicated to making Chicago the most immigrant friendly city in the world by better leveraging the contributions of immigrants through enhanced collaboration between city government, community organizations, academic and faith based institutions, and the private sector. Mr. Hernandez has worked to develop and implement policies and strategies that support the creation and expansion of immigrant-owned businesses, that develop, attract, and retain talent and expertise from other countries, and that bolster Chicago's status as a vibrant and welcoming international city. Under his leadership the ONA has launched the New Americans Small Business Series, the Chicago New Americans Initiative offering assistance to thousands of legal permanent residents who are ready to become U.S. citizens, and the creation of The Chicago New Americans Plan. The son of Mexican immigrants, Mr. Hernandez was born and raised in Chicago's Little Village community.

Dan Rearick, Executive Director, Uniting NC

Raleigh, NC

Dan Rearick is the Executive Director and a founding board member of Uniting NC, a North Carolina based nonprofit. "We launched Uniting NC because we need to do more to welcome our immigrant neighbors. New immigrants have made our country what it is today, but we often forget that. And when we as a community fail to support new immigrants, we all lose out on their potential to share new ideas, build new businesses and enrich our culture." To address these challenges, Uniting NC launched programs designed to bring together longtime residents and recent immigrants to learn from one another, give back to their communities and engage in their children's education. Dan has also worked as an attorney on behalf of immigrant and low-income communities at the North Carolina Justice Center. Prior to practicing law, Dan attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Harvard Law School, and in between he worked at an orphanage in Santa Cruz, Bolivia.

**Jan A. Reeves, Director, Idaho Office for Refugees
Boise, ID**

Jan Reeves serves as Director of the Idaho Office for Refugees (IOR) based in Boise. The IOR administers multiple grants awarded by the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement and other organizations and agencies aimed at fostering the economic self-sufficiency and social integration of refugees resettling across the State. The IOR's mission is to promote mutual understanding between refugees and the larger community by sharing information, encouraging social interaction and creating opportunities for refugees to participate in all aspects of community life. During the last 5 years, Mr. Reeves, in partnership with the City of Boise Mayor's Office, has led the effort to more fully integrate refugees into the community and create a more welcoming environment for all newcomers. Through the successful engagement of dozens of community partners, this effort has led to the development and implementation of Boise's first Refugee Community Plan.

**Fatima Said, Executive Director, Project FINE
Winona, MN**

Fatima Said serves as Executive Director for Project FINE, a nonprofit organization that is focused on integrating newcomers through education. In her role, she provides direction for the organization and works to build cross-sector partnerships that benefit both immigrants and refugees, and the receiving community. Working with newcomers is Fatima's passion, stemming from her personal experience as a refugee from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Fatima is a strong advocate for developing inclusive communities and has been recognized with several local and statewide awards for her dedication to helping our newest neighbors.

**Christine Sauvé, Southeast Communities Coordinator, Welcoming Michigan
Detroit, MI**

Christine Sauvé coordinates activities in southeast Michigan for the Welcoming Michigan project, a statewide grassroots immigrant integration initiative of the Michigan Immigrant Rights Center. Through dialogue, shared meals, and other opportunities for cross-cultural learning, the project aims to foster mutual respect and understanding among U.S. and foreign-born residents. Since launching in 2012, Christine has helped Welcoming Michigan create connections between neighbors at over 50 events with over 2,000 attendees. Christine received her MSW from the University of Michigan School of Social Work and is a multicultural community organizer dedicated to creating social change in metro Detroit. In 2012 she received a Diversity Distinction Award from the City of Sterling Heights, MI and previously served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Mauritania and Senegal in West Africa.

Jocelyn Skolnik, Executive Director, El Sol, Jupiter's Neighborhood Resource Center

Jupiter, FL

Originally from Guatemala, Jocelyn Skolnik moved to Jupiter, Florida to complete her undergraduate studies at Florida Atlantic University's Honors College. Jocelyn serves as Executive Director of El Sol, Jupiter's Neighborhood Resource Center in Jupiter, Florida. Under her leadership El Sol has become a model for communities seeking to serve day laborers and promote positive immigrant integration. El Sol fulfills its mission every day by organizing and supervising Jupiter's day-labor hiring in an organized and safe atmosphere. Beyond organizing day-labor, El Sol offers language and literacy instruction, counseling, health education, civic education, legal, occupational and financial workshops. El Sol is exemplary because it provides a critical bridge between the immigrant and U.S.-born populations of Jupiter -- a location where the two-way process of integration has rapidly taken root through the daily practice of working together to achieve a common purpose.

**Thomas Wahlrab, Former Executive Director, City of Dayton Human Relations Council
Dayton, OH**

Tom Wahlrab is the former Executive Director of the City of Dayton (Ohio) Human Relations Council and the Dayton Mediation Center. Mr. Wahlrab is one of the principal facilitators of the community conversation that resulted in the *Welcome Dayton* Plan. He supported the process that resulted in the City of Dayton's Second Generation Disparity Study and subsequent Procurement Enhancement Plan Ordinance and Policy. He has thirty years working in government and private sector environments involving affirmative action, contract compliance, civil rights, mediation and conflict management, community building, civic engagement and workplace team systems development. He received his BA from Central State University, Wilberforce, Ohio and a MS Ed. from the University of Dayton. Mr. Wahlrab is a Fellow and Board member with the Institute for the Study of Conflict Transformation (ISCT), a former member of the Board of Directors for the National Association for Community Mediation (NAFCM) and a founding member and first chairperson of the Ohio Community Mediation Association.

**Brenda Zion, Executive Director, OneMorgan County Fort
Morgan, CO**

Brenda Zion is the 4th generation member of her family to call Morgan County home. She has a background in psychology, organizational leadership, adult literacy, nonprofit management and immigration law and maintains a State of Colorado Literacy Instruction Authorization and Board of Immigration Appeals Accreditation. Brenda has been with OneMorgan County—an immigrant integration-focused nonprofit organization serving Morgan County and the northeast region of Colorado—since 2008. She lead the organization as it transitioned from a grant-funded program under Morgan Community College to an independent nonprofit. Under her leadership OneMorgan County's immigrant integration work has been recognized with Group Publishing's Community Service Award in the area of Civic Community Services, Fort Morgan Police Department's Citizen Citation for Meritorious Service, the Fort Morgan Area Chamber of Commerce 2011 Citizen of the Year award, a US Department of State Certificate of Appreciation and Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains Distinguished Community Partner of the Year Award 2012. Brenda believes in the benefit of cohesive communities, the effectiveness of collaboration, the strength of servant leadership, the advantage of bridging social capital and the power of synergy.

About Welcoming America

Welcoming America, founded in 2009, is a national, grassroots-driven collaborative that promotes mutual respect and cooperation between foreign-born and U.S.-born Americans. Through a countrywide network of member organizations and partners, Welcoming America works to promote a welcoming atmosphere – community by community – in which immigrants and native-born residents

can find common ground and shared prosperity. Welcoming America works with a vibrant network of 20 affiliates in 19 states, 19 local governments in 13 states, and other partners across the country that work to foster more welcoming communities. For more information, visit www.welcomingamerica.org.

Contacts

David Lubell

Executive Director, Welcoming America

david@welcomingamerica.org

(404) 406-3978 (cell)

250 E. Ponce de Leon Ave., Ste. 320, Decatur, GA 30030

www.welcomingamerica.org

Rachel Steinhardt

Deputy Director, Welcoming America

rachel@welcomingamerica.org

(443) 690-2511 (cell)

250 E. Ponce de Leon Ave., Ste. 320, Decatur, GA 30030

www.welcomingamerica.org

###