

## PLACE WHERE NEWCOMERS TO U.S. FOUND HELPING HAND

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**Byline:** BY BILL HUTCHINSON DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

### **Body**

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FOR IMMIGRANTS in the Binghamton area, the white building on Front St. is the first stop in the quest for the American dream.

Since 1939, the American Civic Association has been a magnet for newcomers from across the globe to learn English and the skills for U.S. citizenship.

"This is an incredibly sad day," Fred Trzcinski, former director of the association, told the Daily News after yesterday's s bloodbath.

"I stood with the police in front of American Civic this morning in total disbelief of what was happening.

"My assistant that I hired, I don't know if she's s alive or dead right now. There are immigration caseworkers, teachers that I knew very well who may be dead."

The nonprofit center also assists immigrants seeking housing, clothes, medical care, employment and legal help.

"They come from all over the globe," Trzcinski said. "There's s no predominant place they come from."

More than 7,100 immigrants have settled in Binghamton since 2005, 71% from Asian countries, according to city statistics.

The civic association, funded in part by the United Way, serves about 60 to 100 people a day, offering translation services, counseling and Internet access.

"The mission of the American Civic Association is to encourage the spirit of brotherhood among nations and peoples," the group says in its literature.

The association's s small staff and team of volunteers also make the facility available for countless cultural activities, including dances and art shows.

Yesterday, more than 50 immigrants from China, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Vietnam and other countries were taking classes, studying for citizenship exams.

Trzcinski said that prior to the Sept. 11 attacks, the group had helped about 240 people become naturalized citizens in Broome County annually. Since 9/11, the number has dwindled to about 70 a year.

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"Everything now is more difficult and more arduous in terms of paperwork and security," Trzcinski said.

[whutchinson@nydailynews.com](mailto:whutchinson@nydailynews.com)

## Graphic

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Police canvass scene yesterday at American Civic Association in Binghamton, where crazed gunman killed 13, then himself. Photo by AP

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