



'I Pledge Allegiance'

Naturalization ceremony celebrates newest American citizens.



New American citizens recite the Pledge of Allegiance at a Citizens Day naturalization ceremony Sept. 13 at Market Square.



Maximiliano Aedoespicto at the ceremony honoring new American citizens Sept. 13 at Market Square.



Two of America's newest citizens celebrate at the Sept 13 naturalization ceremony at Market Square.



A new U.S. citizen places a hand over her heart as she recites the Pledge of Allegiance Sept. 13 at Market Square.

PHOTOS BY JANET BARNETT/GAZETTE PACKET

By JEANNE THEISMANN
GAZETTE PACKET

Mayor Justin Wilson was on hand as 25 immigrants from 24 different countries were welcomed as America's newest citizens with a Citizenship Day celebration Sept. 13 in Market

Square.

The ceremony was the first in-person naturalization event since 2019.

"This journey has been one of the most fulfilling experiences of my life," said Maximiliano Aedoespicto, whose family are first-generation immigrants from Chile. "This day is a fulfillment of everything

my parents gave up in leaving our family back home. Getting the citizenship today fulfills their entire journey and just makes this place more of a real home for me."

Michael Valverde, Associate Director for Field Operations for the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, administered the Oath of

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'We Have Lost a Giant'

Disability rights champion Chet Avery dies at 85.

By JEANNE THEISMANN
GAZETTE PACKET

Chet Avery, a disability rights stalwart who helped transform protections for persons with disabilities across the country, died Sept. 8 at his home in Alexandria. He was 85.

Blind from the age of 17, Avery spearheaded tangible changes in Alexandria including curb cuts, a central library with no stairs and an office dedicated to serving Talking Book users, an accessible courthouse, accessible voting machines and a human rights ordi-

nance that includes persons with disabilities as a protected class.

"Chet's fingerprints are all across Alexandria, especially for people like myself who are blind," said Douglas Goist, who served on the Commission on Persons With Disabilities. "We spoke often about the commission's efforts to get spoken announciators installed on all DASH and Metro buses in Alexandria and Chet was always willing to help in any way he could. Although he is no longer here, his impact on persons with disabilities will be seen, heard and felt for generations to come. He truly was Alexandria's forefather of disability rights."

Chester Pike Avery Jr. was born Aug. 1, 1937, to Chester Avery Sr. and his wife Gladys. He grew up in Sanford, Maine, where he was known among his friends as Spike.

"Before Spike went blind he and I were typical goof offs," said childhood friend Roger Marquis. "The summer he incurred the

"Chet truly was Alexandria's forefather of disability rights."

Former Commission on Persons With Disabilities member Douglas Goist

detached retina and was admitted to Mass General in Boston everything changed. I kind of became his crutch from driving to reading and companionship. Funny thing happened, I got paid \$1 an hour to read to him by the State of Maine for his high school class work and mine. Spike got grades good enough to

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PHOTO BY NINA TISARA/TISARA PHOTOGRAPHY

Chet Avery, a Living Legend of Alexandria, died Sept. 8 at the age of 85.

Naturalization Ceremony Celebrates Newest American Citizens

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Allegiance prior to the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance and presentation of citizenship certificates.

“Today we presided over the naturalization of 25 people from 24 different countries,” Valverde said. “These 25 individuals chose to be members of our nation and today we watched the nation get stronger and more prosperous.”

To become a naturalized citizen an individual must meet federal requirements, including a period of continuous residence and physical presence in the United States; ability to read, write and speak English; knowledge and understanding of United States history and government; good moral character; and attachment to constitutional principles.

“Today is a message of thanks,” Valverde said. “We’re grateful that they joined our community and we are a better nation because of it.”

“This day is a fulfillment of everything my parents gave up in leaving our family back home.”

— New U.S. citizen Maximiliano Aedoespicto



Mayor Justin Wilson presents a certificate of U.S. citizenship during the Sept 13 Naturalization ceremony at Market Square.



Basant Lamiccane, left, celebrates his new U.S. citizenship with son Ayan and wife Sarita Chaulagain Sept. 13 at Market Square.

HOTOS BY JANET BARNETT/CAZETTE PACKET



Luis Fernando Paredes, originally from Colombia, proudly waves the American flag at the Citizenship ceremony Sept. 13 at Market Square.



U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services representative Michael Valverde, center, celebrates new American citizens Hamza Najib, left, and David Nassar Sept. 13 at Market Square.



America's newest citizens recite the Pledge of Allegiance at the Sept. 13 naturalization ceremony at Market Square.