

Homestead welcomes America's newest citizens

BY EMILY HEMPHILL/DAILY SUN STAFF WRITER

The number 3802 could carry a lot of different meanings. Maybe it's the number on a 4-H cow's ear tag. Perhaps it represents the \$38.02 total at the bottom of a grocery receipt.

For Anita Mayo, 3802 is a small reminder of how different her life could have been.

Mayo, an attorney in Omaha, specializes in family and juvenile law. She is also an American citizen and proud of it.

Mayo was adopted at age 4 from Seoul, South Korea, by her parents, Jim and Audrey Mayo of Broken Bow. She was assigned orphan number 3802 at what is now Holt International Children's Services, an adoption agency that began in South Korea after the Korean War to help children who had lost their parents or been abandoned.

She arrived at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago on Dec. 1, 1963, in a state of declining health.

"Had (my parents) not gotten me at the time they got me, I would have not made it," Mayo said as she spoke to 165 high school students at the Homestead National Monument on Wednesday.

The monument hosted a naturalization ceremony on Sept. 17, formally known as Constitution Day, the day the United States Constitution was signed in 1787.

Fifty-nine people took the oath to become U.S. citizens Wednesday after completing a written citizenship test. By taking the oath, they renounced their rights as citizens of their native countries.

Those 59 people came from countries like Burma, Iraq, Vietnam, Mexico, Sudan, Cameroon, Thailand, the Dominican Republic and Venezuela.

Those 59 people can now enjoy all the freedoms guaranteed to them by the Constitution and also have accepted the responsibility to defend and protect the U.S. like a natural-born citizen.



Photo by Emily Hemphill/Daily Sun staff



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District Court Judge Paul Korslund, Beatrice, poses questions about the constitution to high school students at the Homestead National Monument.



Judge Korslund introduces his wife, Bernadette, (standing front row of chairs) a naturalized U. S. citizen from France. Bernadette is a regular volunteer at the Homestead National Monument. Donna Dorn (right), Court Bailiff stands at the ready to distribute quiz questions to students.



—Judicial Branch photos

Mayo was naturalized in Custer County in 1964. She was 4 years old, so the judge did not require her to take any sort of test.

She chose to recite the Pledge of Allegiance instead.

“That was the moment for me. That’s the great pride that I have to tell my story of how I came here,” Mayo said. Look how many people try to come here every year, every day. I feel very, very lucky.”

Mayo shared the floor with district judge Paul Korslund, who spoke about the history of American government and how the Constitution came to be what it is today. Korslund quizzed the students from Norris and Mullen high schools to see if they could answer some of the questions on the citizenship test.

Some of those questions were: What is the supreme law of the land? What are the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment? How many justices are on the Supreme Court?

While the students knew most of the answers, some questions were more difficult than others. Korslund emphasized that words like “amendment,” “constitution” and “legislature” can trip people up on the test, especially if they are not fluent in the English language.

“Studying these things is not easy,” he said.

The Bill of Rights allows language interpreters in courtrooms as one way to help foreign-born people understand court proceedings.

Court interpreter Raul Escobar also addressed the students at the event, explaining that the legal protection of interpretation extends beyond criminal court and also covers adoptions, protection orders, name changes, tenant/landlord disputes and other court proceedings.

“That is a wonderful thing this country takes into consideration and actually puts into practice,” Escobar said.



He asked the students to imagine traveling to another country and having to go to court.

“Knowing your level of skill in that language, would you be comfortable going through the court hearing in that language?” he asked. “Even if you do have a fairly good command of the language, what happens if you miss a couple of vital, important words?”

Escobar was born in Juarez, Mexico, and emigrated to Denver at age 8. He began interpreting for his parents as they settled in the United States and began interpreting full-time for courts in 2001.

He said 20 different languages have been used in the Nebraska court system over the last year and encouraged the students to study other languages and travel abroad for schooling as much as possible.

“Not only will that cement all the school learning you did on that language, but it will open other opportunities to you,” he said.

At the naturalization ceremony, Immigration Services Officer Jeffrey Beil called the roll of new citizens before courtroom deputy Sara Pankoke administered their oath. U.S. Magistrate Judge F.A. Gossett III spoke to the new citizens, welcoming them to America.

“America promises you the pursuit of happiness, but it does not promise you will be happy,” he said. “The saga of America is a story that’s still being written. America’s strength flows from the diversity of its citizenship.”



Top: Raul Escobar, State Interpreter Coordinator

Middle: Omaha Attorney Anita Mayo

Bottom: Taking the Oath of Citizenship

Right: Federal Magistrate and former State Court Judge F. A. Gossett

—Judicial Branch photos