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GUEST COLUMN: Citizenship crucial for immigrants

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Written by Sandra McAnany

It is easy for anyone of us who were born in the United States to take rights automatically received by citizens for granted.

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We can vote, do not have to worry about being deported if charged with a crime and can visit other countries without the fear of losing our right to be here. In contrast, immigrants who are our friends, neighbors and relatives, face many struggles and challenges in the community.

In Tennessee, the importance of immigration and assisting individuals with the process to become citizens is a growing need. When changes in census data were measured from 2000 to 2010, Tennessee was one of the five states with the largest percent

growth of immigrant population and had an 82 percent increase. Other states in the top five included Alabama (92 percent), South Carolina (88 percent), Arkansas (79 percent), and Kentucky (75 percent).

According to the Census Bureau, in 2010 the U.S. immigrant population was almost 40 million. Almost 17.5 million of these immigrants were naturalized U.S. citizens. The remaining 22.5 million immigrants included legal permanent residents (LPR), unauthorized immigrants and legal residents on temporary visas.

On Jan. 1, 2010, an estimated 12.6 million immigrants with LPR status lived in the

United States and 8.1 million of those LPRs were eligible to apply for citizenship. Annually on average, only 1 million or less of eligible LPRS become citizens.

By helping legal permanent residents to become citizens, we are making an investment in our nation's future.

When an immigrant becomes a naturalized citizen, they may have the chance to reunite their family in the United States by helping

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close relatives obtain visas. Also, immigrant children under the age of 18 are able to automatically become U.S. citizens when the parents become naturalized citizens.

Becoming a naturalized citizen also allows the immigrant to leave the country if needed without having to worry about being gone for 180 days or longer. Legal permanent residents can lose their status if they leave the country for an extended absence.

The most important benefit of becoming a citizen is the right to vote and participate in government as a candidate.

If you are a legal permanent resident and interested in applying to become a citizen, consider coming to the Citizenship Assistance Workshop in Franklin on Sunday, April 1, from 2 to 5:30 p.m. at Saint Philip Catholic Church, 113 2nd Ave. South. There will be volunteers and attorneys available to assist immigrants with completing the N-400 application for Naturalization and to review the future steps of the application process. Additional information is available by calling TN Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC) at 615-833-0384.

Sandra McAnany is a Deerwood Avenue resident who relocated to Tennessee last year and works in the public sector. She is also an active volunteer, advocate, wife, mother and grandmother.

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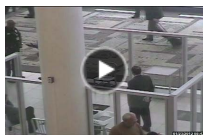
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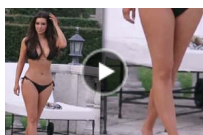


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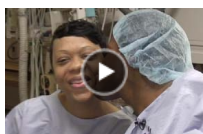
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