

Cameron Mathews/Fort Morgan Times

## Sworn in

Twenty-two immigrants from several countries rose to their feet Thursday in a special swearing-in ceremony. The immigrants swore an oath of allegiance in becoming U.S. citizens in front of a packed house at Baker Central School.

# 22 new Americans

## Immigrants celebrate their citizenship

By CAMERON MATHEWS

Times Staff Writer

Twenty-two people from five different countries celebrated their American citizenship Thursday in a naturalization ceremony at Baker Central School in Fort Morgan.

Immigrants from Africa, Bangladesh, India, Mexico and Russia all took an oath of allegiance to become official citizens of the U.S.

As each of them sat quietly in their seats, family members, friends, teachers and students

gradually filled the school's gymnasium. The Lake Street Choir entertained attendees with the singing of the National Anthem and a personal selection, "My America." Boy Scout Troop 22 presented the colors.

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Dan Patterson and Barbara Melton with the Office of Citizenship delivered a brief greeting and introduction to welcome the 22 immigrants not only to their new home, but to their new country.

Mario R. Ortiz, the district

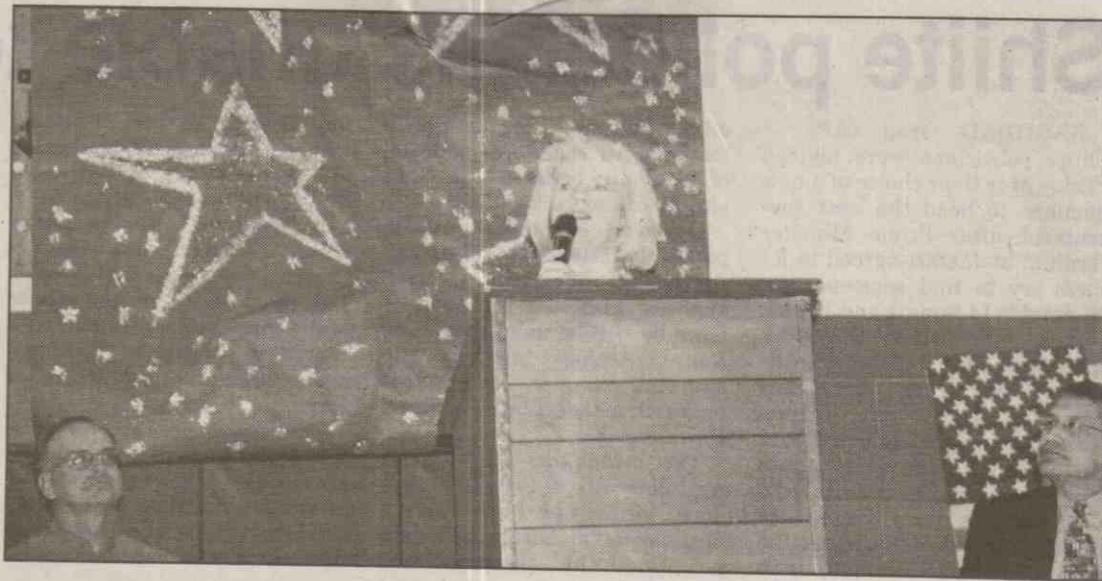
director for the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), discussed the sacrifice each immigrant has made to become a U.S. citizen. Commitment and courage have led each of them to the shores of America to begin a new life under new citizenship, he said.

"It has been a tremendous sacrifice for these people to immigrate to this country," Ortiz said. "It is not easy to come to this country and leave everything behind to start a new life. I am inspired by all

these people who bring such wonderful stories to tell about their commitment and courage. They bring creativity to America which keeps our country alive."

Ortiz felt the naturalization ceremony was like an infusion of new love into a new country. The incredible amount of passion and spirit each immigrant brings to this country is what makes our country stronger, he said.

"It is a celebration for those who have come from outside our



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## A message of freedom

Rep. Marilyn Musgrave, R-Colo., delivers a speech on freedom Thursday during the naturalization ceremony at Baker Central School. Musgrave welcomed each of the 22 new U.S. citizens to America and said the ceremony was a celebration of freedom to honor each of them as new family members in a new country they now call home.

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country to contribute to our family," Ortiz said.

The crowd anxiously shuffled as immigrants came to their feet, raised their hands in the air and echoed Ortiz' words in the oath of allegiance. A standing ovation and heavy round of applause filled the gymnasium as the newly announced U.S. citizens shook hands and shared hugs with one another.

Each citizen was then called out by name and presented with a certificate, passport and voter registration card.

Cynthia Price, principal at Baker, said the names of the new U.S. citizens could not be released as they are protected by the Privacy Act.

U.S. Congresswoman Marilyn Musgrave helped host the special ceremony.

"Freedom," Musgrave said. "That's what this celebration is all about. I wish them all success as new citizens of a great nation."

Rodgers Kanani, one of the 22 new citizens, said he lived in Africa until he was 25 years old before moving to Wiggins for family reasons. He has been a Morgan County resident for 30 years and said he made the

was present at the ceremony with mother Grace to celebrate her father's initiation into U.S. citizenship. Rodgers said now he can talk freely about politics, run for offices and talk with the mayor if he wants where he wouldn't have the chance to if he returned to his native country in Tanzania, Africa.

"It was an electrifying day," he said. "It felt very good and Americans are good people. They have been good to me ever since I came here. I can't believe I can start running for offices myself now. It really was an amazing day for everyone."

A video message from President George W. Bush followed the presentation. In his message, Bush welcomed all the immigrants into their new country and home by encourag-

ing them to pursue their dreams and practice their faith.

"I am honored to be your president," Bush stated. "Today, the United States is not only your home, it's your country."

While the newly named citizens filed out of the gymnasium, they were reminded that they didn't simply receive a certificate at the celebration, but were given the power of voice, the right to vote and the opportunity for freedom. For the 22 new U.S. citizens, the naturalization celebration was a tribute to honor them as new family members in a place they now call home.

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"I have been in the country 30 years," Kanani said. "I don't feel comfortable going back (to Africa) because they don't want people influencing its politics there. The country seemed like a state and I have a country now."

Bazi Kanani, Rodgers' daughter, a 1995 graduate of Wiggins High School and broadcast journalist for 9News