



# McCourt Welcomes New Citizens on July 4

“It is a dazzling day,” Pulitzer Prize-winning author Frank McCourt said as he opened his July 4 address. “And it’s a hot one.”

But the formidable summer weather—bright and sunny with temperatures in the mid-90s and high humidity—was not the dominant issue of the day for the prospective U.S. citizens, family members, friends, and others gathered on Monticello’s West Lawn for the 40th annual Independence Day Celebration and Naturalization Ceremony.

Love, diversity, patriotism, and an increased appreciation for freedom were among the topics stressed during the event, held on the first Independence Day after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Featured speaker McCourt, author of the best-selling



Frank McCourt speaking at Monticello on July 4.

memoir *Angela’s Ashes*, was born in Brooklyn to Irish immigrant parents, moved with his family to Ireland at age 4, and returned to New York City at 19. Although he now lives in Connecticut and was vacationing in Europe at the time of the attacks, he explained that he felt an immediate “yearning” to be in New York that day.

“When I look back on why [my wife and I] wanted to get back, it can be traced to one thing: love,” he said, comparing the feeling to Jefferson’s love for Monticello.

“We suddenly realized what a terrific country we lived in. And we began to think about being American in a way that we had never thought before.”

Reflecting on his first years in New York as a young man strug-

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# MONTICELLO



## New Citizens

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gling to find work alongside immigrant workers from around the world, he said, “It isn’t the unity, it’s the diversity of this country that makes it great.”

Speaking directly to the prospective citizens, he added, “What you’re doing is expanding the American language, because my children and my grandchildren will know words that you brought into this country.”

He earned laughs from the crowd as he continued: “Where would we be without the word ‘spaghetti’? And the French—where would we be without the word ‘lingerie’? I love that word. I could say it all day.”

In concluding his remarks, McCourt advised those in the audience to take their children to the nearest public library. “I guarantee you, it will be air-conditioned,” he said with a smile.

In the naturalization ceremony, a formal session of the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Virginia, 73 adults from 34 countries ranging from A (Afghanistan) to Z (Zimbabwe) took the oath of citizenship and nine children adopted by American parents received certificates of citizenship.

Three of the new citizens later took the stage to voice their thoughts on what was for them a momentous day. Jose Carlos Da Ponte, a native of Portugal, was the first to speak.

“It is here in this land that we are promised life, we are promised liberty, and we have the right to pursue happiness,” he said. “This is not heaven, but it is right next door to it.”

– Jessica Tyree

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