

Thomas Jefferson

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Independence Day celebration spotlights new citizens with national coverage

EMOTIONS SOARED during the 49th annual Independence Day Celebration and Naturalization Ceremony at Monticello as dozens of new citizens shared their personal stories of becoming Americans with a patriotic crowd. One new citizen perhaps said it best: "My life is now complete."

More than 2,500 people gathered on the West Lawn on July 4, 2011, to take part in Monticello's most inspirational day of the year. The sun was bright and the crowd was enthusiastic as 77 new American citizens raised their hands and took the oath of citizenship.

This year's speaker, Muhtar Kent, the Chairman and CEO of The Coca-Cola Company, vividly described the meaning of freedom and liberty. A dual citizen of the United States and Turkey, Kent revealed how he turned the American dream into reality through perseverance and personal drive.

"I saw so much potential and opportunity—and I chose to make my life here. Maybe my faith in America was naïveté or blind optimism. But I don't believe it was. Not for a minute," Kent told the new citizens.

The citizens came from 44 countries, from Argentina to Uzbekistan. Jenny Mendoza, a native of El Salvador, was interviewed by Jenna Wolfe, *Sunday Today Show* co-anchor

and weekday correspondent, live on the West Lawn just before the ceremony.

Mendoza said she had intended to become a United States citizen "since day one" and that life as an American citizen would give her voting rights and federal job opportunities. When Mendoza discovered she was going to become an American citizen on Independence Day at Monticello, she told Wolfe she was elated.

Naturalized citizen Ladi Carr was also interviewed for the *Today Show* story. She recounted her journey to citizenship and her belief in the importance of being naturalized at the home of Thomas Jefferson. She told Wolfe she wanted to be naturalized on the steps of Monticello because Thomas Jefferson was the symbol of hope in a world of turmoil.

The unprecedented coverage of this year's Independence Day Celebration and Naturalization Ceremony continued with The Coca-Cola Company's generous sponsorship of the event. Spreading the message of citizenship and patriotism to a national audience, The Coca-Cola Company broadcast excerpts of the celebration at Monticello on JumboTrons across the country. Prominent locations included the Washington Nationals July 4th game, Centennial



Muhtar Kent (right), Chairman and CEO of The Coca-Cola Company, congratulates a new citizen during the Independence Day Celebration and Naturalization Ceremony at Monticello. TJF

Olympic Park, and the Texas Rangers July 4th game.

Leslie Greene Bowman, President and CEO of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, said this year's ceremony was one of the best yet.

"I cannot think of a better place to honor the legacy of our third president, the birth of our great nation, or to welcome our new fellow Americans ... than on the steps of Jefferson's Monticello," said Bowman.

Next year Monticello will celebrate the 50th anniversary of naturalization ceremonies on the West Lawn.