

## Waterston stirs crowd on Fourth of July

*76 are sworn in as U.S. citizens*

By Laura E. Bland

THE JUDGES wore robes. The television star wore a bow tie. The crowd wore red, white, and blue. Monticello's 45th Independence Day ceremony Wednesday morning was a blend of raucous celebration and solemn official business. The weather wasn't bad, either.

Award-winning actor Sam Waterston, star of NBC's long-running *Law & Order* series, provided both glitter and gravitas, issuing a call to action for the 76 people from 36 countries who were about to be sworn in as American citizens on the West Lawn of Thomas Jefferson's mountaintop home.

"From your first breath as an American citizen, make it known what matters to you," Waterston said. "Put participation back into participatory democracy."

The Academy Award-nominated actor received a rare standing ovation after his 20-minute speech, but it was 27-year-old Ehonam Miheaye Agbati who eventually took to the microphone and stole the show.

"Americans have a duty to keep freedom alive for eternity," said Agbati, a native of the West African country of Togo, who was one of six members of his family to be sworn in as a new citizen.

Agbati was one of two new citizens who answered the invitation from U.S. District Judge James P. Jones – presiding over an informal courtroom on the steps of Monticello, complete with court reporter – to speak. Agbati won rounds of applause and calls from the crowd as he urged Americans to pray for troops around the world who, he said, are fighting for the freedom that citizens have in this country.

COMMENTS?

[newsletter@monticello.org](mailto:newsletter@monticello.org)



**Actor Sam Waterston speaking at Monticello's 45th annual Independence Day observance.**

TJF / Stephanie Gross

The naturalization ceremony at Monticello is an iconic event among many July Fourth celebrations. Jefferson died there on the 50th anniversary of America's independence, a movement fueled by words and ideas never known before in the world until Jefferson sat down and started writing on a blank sheet of paper, Waterston said.

"By scratching away at the page, he called a country into being, knowing as he wrote that the country was no more than an idea," Waterston said of Jefferson. "And that the idea, at any instant, might be erased and destroyed and the United States of America might just become another sorry footnote in the history of suppressed rebellions against tyranny." Waterston urged the new citizens to

let Jefferson be the nation's example of a leader who emphasized the importance of individuals acting together for the common good.

With all of its beauty and preserved slave quarters, Monticello is a reminder, Continued on next page.

*Thomas Jefferson*  
**MONTICELLO**

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# Fourth of July

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Waterston said, “that our old country, your new country, for all of its glory, has always had feet of clay and work that needed doing.” He added, “So it’s good that you’ve come, fresh troops and reinforcements – we old citizens could use some help.”

Although best known for his acting work, Waterston has a long resume of public service and is a member of a national group pushing for a bipartisan presidential ticket in 2008. He urged those newest Americans to think of their citizenship as a job.

“This is not a job just for the talking heads on TV and the politicians, nor is it the job of the moneyed interests or the single issue movements,” Waterston said. “Don’t we leave a good deal of life and liberty to the government to attend to so that we can concentrate full time on the pursuit of happiness?”

Politics, he added, is only normal if individual citizens’ voices are heard.

After Waterston’s speech, U.S. Marshal Wayne Pike declared court in session. John L. Brownlee, the U.S.

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SAM WATERSTON

attorney for the Western District of Virginia, read the names of each petitioner as they gathered on the steps of Monticello. Jones administered the oath of citizenship. Each new citizen received a certificate and, as they filed back to their seats, a printed copy of the Pledge of Allegiance rolled up and tied with patriotic ribbon, courtesy of area Daughters of the American Revolution chapters.

Also among those sworn in was Kiet Quoc Tran, a 54-year-old engineer and native of Vietnam. He came to this country 32 years ago, his children growing up a few roads and a view away from Monticello. His daughters, Elizabeth and Amanda, finally persuaded Kiet to take the step of citizenship now that they are grown. But, he said, not that much will change with his new status.

“It will be the same – get up, go to work,” Kiet said.

*Laura E. Bland is a staff writer at The Daily Progress of Charlottesville. This article, which was published in the newspaper’s July 5 issue, is reprinted with permission.*

*A podcast of Sam Waterston’s July 4 speech and a transcript are available on the Web site [monticello.org](http://monticello.org).*

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