



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services



USCIS TODAY



A MESSAGE FROM USCIS DIRECTOR EMILIO T. GONZALEZ

February marks my first month with USCIS, and I am motivated by the challenges we face and the many efforts our team is making to meet them. USCIS is the most exciting place to work in government at this moment, and I truly believe that. Here's why:

Transformation: USCIS leaders and employees at every level are working hard to redesign every facet of our business process through overhauling the technology systems and infrastructure that will support those processes. We want to convert the time our people spend pushing and hunting through papers and logging onto different systems into time spent analyzing information readily before them and applying the complex rules of immigration to that information. With customer accounts in all cases, we will be able to minimize wasted time for our customers re-filing previously filed information. It is an amazing privilege for all of us to have the opportunity to have real input into the transformation of our business.

Budget: We are working to identify all of our current and future costs for doing business. We plan to fundamentally restructure the fees we charge for services so that we can cover all of our expenses without cutting corners and make the needed investments for improving our processes. Financial stability is essential to our performance. In order to improve customer service and enhance security, we will demonstrate our ability to achieve our backlog goals and transform our business, to gain our stakeholders' support. All of this comes at a time when immigration is the major domestic policy issue of the day. Our work is important. Our tasks are exciting. Everyone's contribution matters much.

New Component: In order to support our organization more effectively, I am taking the three divisions of FDNS, Records, and FOCUS out of Domestic Operations and putting them under a new unit called "Verification." This unit will be parallel to the Office of Domestic Operations and the Office of Refugee, Asylum, and International Operations. Within this unit, FOCUS will report to FDNS, and the Office of Records will encompass the SAVE Program. An SES leader, who will report to the Deputy Director, will lead the Verification Unit. Janis Sposato, currently Deputy Associate Director for Domestic Operations, will act in this capacity while the position is being competed. Our Office of Fraud Detection and National Security has posted many successes in its first two years, including some useful benefit fraud assessments, and is establishing meaningful working relationships with ICE, counterparts in the State Department, the FBI and with other law enforcement agencies. The FOCUS team's careful attention to national security issues in complex cases has brought special respect from our colleagues. Verification and Records, through this reorganization, will include management of the SAVE program, digitizing A-files, and handling FOIA requests requiring careful attention. Our SAVE program is being recognized as an increasingly central component to the Secretary's Secure Borders Initiative and may also handle the prospect of mandatory verification of alien status by employers and motor vehicle departments nationwide.

As you can see, I am myself an immigrant with a passion for facilitating legal immigration with world-class customer service. I am equally passionate about protecting our nation and protecting the integrity of our system from external fraud and internal corruption. As I travel to different offices of every type, unannounced as much as possible, I am continually impressed by the passion and commitment of our USCIS team members, and I thank you for your service.

FEBRUARY 2006

"Securing America's Promise"

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INTEGRITY . RESPECT . INGENUITY

USCIS HELPS ICE DANCER REACH OLYMPICS

DETROIT OFFICE HOLDS SPECIAL NATURALIZATION CEREMONY



Tanith celebrates her 2006 U.S. Ice Dancing title as a new American Citizen



Tanith shows off her Certificate of Naturalization after a special ceremony at the Detroit USCIS Office

Cheer on Tanith and Ben as they compete for the U.S. in the Ice Dancing Competition at the 2006 Winter Olympics on February 19th and 20th. Check your local TV listings for times and information.

Tanith Belbin, and her ice dancing partner, Ben Agosto, are no strangers to competition. The dynamic duo have won three straight U.S. Ice Dancing titles and took home a silver medal at the 2005 World Championships. However, only American citizens can be on the U.S. Olympic team, and the Canadian-born Tanith was uncertain that she would be able to represent the Stars and Stripes at the upcoming 2006 Olympics in Torino, Italy because she had yet to be naturalized as an American citizen.

Tanith's immigration story begins in 1999, when she received her EB-1 visa after coming to the U.S. to train with Agosto. Tanith recalled, "My skating career allowed me to see the wide world out there, and I found myself looking at the United States as the place where I would have the best opportunity to achieve my goals and the quality of life I wanted. But I had to first demonstrate my ability so that I could apply for Extraordinary Ability status. I was so proud when I received that status in November of 2000 and even more excited when I received my green card in July of 2002."

Shortly after Tanith received her green card, USCIS adjusted existing rules that eliminated the waiting period for EB-1 visa holders to apply for permanent residency. Because Tanith had applied before the new law went into affect, she faced an additional wait before she could apply for citizenship, and thus she and Agosto faced the prospect of missing another Olympics – the pair qualified for the U.S. team at the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics but had to watch from the sidelines as the U.S. team failed to take home a medal.

All uncertainty over her eligibility for the 2006 games was put to rest after President Bush signed the Labor/Health and Human Services appropriations bill that included a temporary provision to accelerate citizenship requests for applicants who began their naturalization process before July of 2002. The rule, which has since expired, changed the residency requirement from five to three years between the receipt of the green card and the date of eligibility for naturalization for EB-1 Visa holders.

U.S. Senator Carl Levin, who introduced the special legislation, called the measure, "A common sense fix..." to allow deserving individuals the opportunity to become American citizens. Russian-born Ice Dancer Maxim Zavozin, also benefited from the congressional action that aided Tanith. After finishing fourth at the U.S. Championships, he and his partner Morgan Matthews will travel to the Olympics as alternates.

On December 31, 2005, Tanith passed the citizenship exam and took the Oath of Allegiance, and like countless immigrants before her, Tanith became an American citizen.

"USCIS was tremendously helpful. I know they have a very difficult job and are at any given moment dealing with tens of thousands of applications," Tanith said. "But they were nevertheless always courteous and efficient when I needed to contact them. And because of the unique circumstances which applied to my becoming a citizen, I will never forget the efforts of people at USCIS headquarters and at the Detroit office."

Today, Tanith and Agosto are in Torino, Italy, practicing for the upcoming Olympic competition, but thoughts of her recent naturalization are still fresh. Reflecting on her trip to Italy, Tanith remarked, "It might sound trite but I have already experienced the joy of being asked by a customs official as I travel, 'What is your country of citizenship?', and answering with pride, the United States."

BUFFALO DISTRICT OFFICE EMPLOYEES TACKLE NEW CHILD CITIZENSHIP ACT APPLICATIONS

In January 2004, the USCIS Buffalo District office began processing orphan immigrant visas (IR-3s) for Certificates of Citizenship pursuant to the Child's Citizenship Act. Before this project started in 2004, adopted immigrant children would receive a green card when they entered the country and their parents would have to apply separately for a citizenship certificate. Today, as a result of the Child Citizenship Act, a specialized section of the Buffalo office is dedicated to processing every Child Citizenship Act application received by USCIS. In the two years since the program began, over 30,000 certificates have been issued.

Buffalo District employees designed a unique software program to simplify the data entry process and production of new certificates. This program allows USCIS to automatically mail Naturalization Certificates with a congratulatory letter and an Informational packet to the adopted child's parents. No alien registration card is produced and no application for this certificate is required.

An important component of the program is the customer service that is provided. Adoption agencies and adoptive parents are aware of the Buffalo project and the USCIS commitment to produce a certificate of citizenship within 45 days of the child's entry to the U.S. Inquiries are received directly from parents and through the NCSC, and Buffalo staff respond to these inquiries promptly. Often it requires some "investigative" work to resolve the individual issue, but the staff excels at these challenges.

Feedback from parents and adoption agencies has been very positive. When the program began there was general disbelief that the 45-day commitment would be reached and maintained. Today, there is great satisfaction, on the part of the adoption community and the Buffalo office staff, to be able to meet, and excel at, this challenge.



USCIS Buffalo District Office employees pose in front of newly completed Naturalization Certificates for adopted children

DON'T WAIT IN LINE...GO ONLINE!!!

[USCIS.gov](http://uscis.gov) features an evolving suite of internet based services that decrease waiting times for customers. The [INFOPASS](#) Online appointment system, our 24-hour [National Customer Service Call Center](#), the ability to file and check the status of applications online using our [E-Filing Online Application Center](#), and other electronic media have improved our ability to both tackle the existing backlog of cases, while handling an increasing number of applicants.

BY THE NUMBERS...BACKLOG ELIMINATION EFFORTS

While USCIS completed 95,747 more cases than were received during December and production met 88.95% of its monthly target, the USCIS backlog increased slightly by less than 21,000 cases in December 2005. The backlog continues to represent 28% of the total pending cases.

This minor increase was mostly concentrated on Form I-485 applications due to a declining trend in receipts that automatically lowers the ceiling that defines the acceptable pending level. As a result, the backlog will automatically increase. This is similar to the redeveloped backlog for Form I-821. Form N-600 backlog also increased over November '05, although this was mostly due to the manner in which file transfers between offices and service centers were accounted for, a process that will be remedied with upcoming transformation efforts.



Yana (Right) shows off her Certificate of Naturalization with her mother, USCIS HQ Employee and Naturalized Citizen, Tatiana Samoylin

**ARE YOU ONE OF THE
“FACES OF AMERICA?”**
[SUBMIT YOUR STORY](#)

FACES OF AMERICA

NEW CITIZENS... UNIQUE STORIES

YANA SAMOYLIN - RUSSIA

Russian native, Yana Samoylin became an American Citizen during a ceremony in Alexandria, Virginia on January 19. Below, Yana shares her thoughts on her immigration experience:

“American Citizenship means a lot to me: I love my adopted country and it's great to know that I am like millions of others who came here to start a new life. The biggest privilege I now enjoy is the right to vote and make a difference with my single voice. Also I look forward to traveling around the world and coming back to my country, The United States of America.”

“I was 13 years old when I came to New York and went to junior school in Quince, NY. It wasn't easy to adjust to the different society. The hardest thing was to be alone, with no friends. I missed my Russian friends and I couldn't even make new ones because I didn't speak English yet. Then little by little I learned English and became brave enough to start conversations with other students. It took me about three years to start feeling comfortable in school and other public places.”

“My mom was naturalized when I was 19, so I had to go through the naturalization process on my own. It was pretty easy. I went on the USCIS.gov website, downloaded the application, filled it out, and sent it to USCIS. I had heard about long backlogs and other difficulties, but everything went smoothly for my application. I was a little bit nervous about the Citizenship Test. The English test was easy, and I spent some time studying about U.S. government structure and U.S. history to pass the civics section. The actual naturalization ceremony was very impressive. I felt like the judge was talking to me personally, and I really liked him saying that now we are all united by U.S. Citizenship and English, but we shouldn't forget our culture and our mother language.”

NEWS YOU CAN USE...

FROM THE OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

[USCIS FY 2007 Budget Request Fact Sheet](#)

USCIS announced the Administration's Fiscal Year 2007 budget request of \$1.98 billion for the agency. This request includes funds to transform USCIS business operations and to expand its Employment Eligibility Verification (EEV) Program in anticipation of a mandatory employment verification requirement. The FY 2007 budget requests \$182 million in discretionary funding and \$1.804 billion in mandatory funding generated from fee revenues paid by persons seeking immigration benefits. USCIS is one of the largest fee-funded agencies in the Federal government.

[USCIS Reaches H-1B Exemption Cap for Fiscal Year 2006, 1/18/06](#)

USCIS announced today that it has received enough H-1B petitions that qualify for the exemption from the H-1B numerical limitations for foreign workers with a U.S.-earned master's or higher degree (the number of aliens exempted from H-1B caps on this basis may not exceed 20,000 per fiscal year). Consequently, USCIS has determined that the "final receipt date" for these 20,000 cap-exempt H-1B petitions is January 17, 2006.



“HOW DO I...?”

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AT USCIS



HOW DO I...CHANGE MY ADDRESS WITH USCIS?

Most non-United States citizens who are in the U.S. are required by law to notify USCIS of any change of address within 10 days after moving to a new address. To notify us of your change of address, you must file a Change of Address [Form, AR-11](#) with USCIS.

Even though it is not required by law, if you have filed any application or petition and it is still pending a decision, you will want to keep USCIS informed of any change of address so you can receive any important notices or decisions via mail.

For more information about the best way to notify us of an address change regarding a pending case file, please see our website, www.uscis.gov, or call our customer service hotline, available 24 hours a day in English and Spanish at 1-800-375-5283.

Please note, however, that providing change of address information over the phone does not satisfy your legal obligation to notify us of your new address in writing on Form AR-11.

The “How Do I...?” Section of USCIS Today contains answers to frequently asked questions from USCIS customers. Additional information and more answers are available English and Spanish on the [How Do I...?](#) section of USCIS.gov

USCIS SAN DIEGO EMPLOYEES CELEBRATE THE MEMORY OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

More than a dozen USCIS employees marched in the 26th annual Martin Luther King Jr. parade on Saturday, January 14, in downtown San Diego. The employees, decked out in USCIS t-shirts and caps, represented both the San Diego District office and the Chula Vista Customer Service Center. They marched carrying the USCIS banner, "Securing America's Promise". This was also the first year that USCIS joined fellow DHS officers in the color guard.

"USCIS is an equal opportunity employer and has a very culturally-diverse staff. Participating in such a meaningful event helps celebrate diversity and equal opportunity for all," said San Diego District Director Debra Rogers. The theme of this year's three-hour parade was "Let Freedom Ring."

The Department of Homeland Security was represented by USCIS, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S. Coast Guard, and the Transportation Security Administration. More than 120 participants from the community participated in this annual multi-cultural event, including government employees, church groups, local elected officials and high school marching bands.



USCIS San Diego employees participate in the 26th annual Martin Luther King Jr. Parade



INTEGRITY . RESPECT . INGENUITY

REAL PEOPLE, REAL PROGRESS

USCIS RECOGNIZES EMPLOYEE EXCELLENCE

Sheila Lucio was born and raised in Harlingen, Texas, deep in the heart of the lower Rio Grande Valley. Sheila began her career with legacy INS at the Harlingen office in September 1982 as a clerk stenographer in the Investigation Section. Since then Sheila has gained experience in various different positions; as Adjudications Clerk in the Examinations Section, Immigration Status Verifier in Records, and currently as an Information Officer in the Information Unit. A widow after 34 years of marriage, Sheila has two adult children, four grand daughters and two great grand daughters. She volunteers teaching a bible study for the deaf children at the Baptist Church and assists deaf women in scheduling doctor's appointments as needed and accompanying them to their appointments if they request.



Name: Sheila Lucio
Position: Immigration Information Officer
Location: Harlingen, TX District
Immigration Information Officers provide a variety of customer services, including certain case services and problem resolution assistance on applications and petitions. They also process and make decisions on some applications and petitions. These positions are located throughout the country in District offices, Sub offices, and Service Centers.

Describe what made you want to learn sign language?

I remember some years back standing in line at one of our local supermarkets I witnessed the frustration in a child, possibly around six to seven years of age, trying to interpret for the parent. In this area, our common language is predominantly Spanish/English. So basically, it is easy to find a Spanish or English speaking store clerk to assist you. However in this instance, the language spoken by the parent was sign language. After witnessing and understanding such a trying moment for such a young interpreter, I decided to learn this language. This really peaked my interest. I felt the child's struggle and decided to enroll in our community college and learn sign language. My main goal was to learn to be able to help the deaf community on any occasion. I took an evening class for one year and felt ready to venture into this silent communication.

Which of your contributions to USCIS are you most proud of?

To be considered as a Referral Source from the agencies which serve the deaf community in our area. As an Information Officer I have had the opportunity of helping the deaf community. I have assisted with many immigration interviews with deaf applicants and have interpreted during oath ceremonies and outreach programs. On October 28, I interpreted for a group of hearing-impaired students visiting the Harlingen USCIS office during "Mentoring Day" which coincided with an Administrative Ceremony they were invited to attend. The enthusiasm and delight on their faces to have witnessed such an important event made it very rewarding.

What's the most memorable moment you've experienced at USCIS?

My most memorable moment is when a deaf person becomes a naturalized citizen. I take great pride in their accomplishment because I have assisted them in each step of the process. From the moment they inquire about the naturalization process, I guide through the completion of the application and provide an explanation of the exam process. I provide, at my own expense a book that was developed locally in sign language to help in studying the questions. I felt honored when a deaf applicant traveled from Oklahoma to "speak" with me about immigrating.

How has USCIS changed since March 2003?

Awareness. USCIS provides more handouts and information in different languages in order to better serve our community. INFOPASS, E-filing and Direct Mailing, are good examples of providing a service to facilitate the immigration process with less waiting time.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO WORK AT USCIS?

Visit USAJOBS Online for more information on openings and opportunities at USCIS and other federal agencies.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT USCIS OCOMM 202.272.1200