Ceremony welcomes new citizens

Cabrillo College hosts swearing-in for 60 people from 14 countries

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APTOS — Some 60 area residents became U.S. citizens Monday in a moving ceremony held at Cabrillo College.

The vast majority were from Mexico; others were born in South America, China, Lebanon, Pakistan, Fiji, the Philippines, Thailand and other countries.

For some, citizenship was a dream that took years to realize, and Monday was a milestone. Some waved small American flags while others cheered or cried during the naturalization ceremony.

Lillyam Tabares of Watsonville said citizenship equates to a safe, permanent place to live. Tabares sought political asylum in 2000 after being kidnapped in her native Colombia while working for a government agency. She was released the next day, she said.

“It was a difficult, very frightening situation,” the retired teacher’s assistant said. “I’m very happy today.”

Colombia is also my country, but my new country is safe and relaxed and very beautiful.”

Tabares has a daughter in Santa Cruz County and two sons who live in Canada; several of her siblings remain in Colombia.

Rep. Sam Farr, D-Carmel, attended the ceremony at Cabrillo’s Session House, urging the new citizens to become active members of their communities. Too many people take their citizenship for granted, he said.

“Our great country was build and continues to be built by immigrants,” Farr said. “No dream is too big or grand to accomplish with hard work and dedication.”

Immigration officials said more than 4,000 immigrants will become citizens at 45 ceremonies across the country from June 28 through July 4. During the past decade, the service has ushered more than 6.6 million naturalized citizens into the nation.

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