

Meet John...



John, born into an Armenian family in Lebanon, has always considered himself an American. When he was a young child, he and his family moved to the U.S. to escape the war in Lebanon. "I came at a young age when there were problems in Beirut, my aunt and uncle got us out so we could get away from the war that was happening in the Middle East," John explains.

While John has been a permanent resident in this country for more than 50 years and even served in the U.S. Army, he was not yet a citizen. "I've always wanted to be a citizen, but I was never told I could be," says John. In 2013, John finally began the process to become a U.S. citizen by enrolling in a [BCCC Citizenship Preparation](#) class taught by instructor Van Nguyen at the [Holiday Park Senior Center](#) in Montgomery County. John passed all the portions of the citizenship test a year later, but then faced challenges along his journey to officially becoming a citizen. The [International Rescue Committee \(IRC\)](#) of Baltimore, the Citizenship Preparation Program's partner and subcontractor for legal services, stepped in to assist John through the extensive naturalization process. He received additional assistance from Senator Ben Cardin's office to help expedite the process. "I was frustrated, but Van (instructor) told me to be patient and said it would happen soon enough. I want to give Van most of the thanks for being there for me as an advocate. She is a dynamite teacher, and very caring for her students," John says.

He took the Oath of Allegiance on January 11, officially becoming a U.S. citizen. Immediately after the oath ceremony, representatives from the League of Women Voters were on-site to register John to vote, along with other new citizens. As one of his new rights of citizenship, John is very excited to be able to vote this November, especially because of the help he received from Senator Cardin's office. John also hopes to return to the Citizenship Preparation class at the Holiday Park Senior Center as a classroom [volunteer](#) to help other students prepare for their citizenship exams.