

# Greenwich Historical Society

BUSH-HOLLEY HOUSE • MUSEUM • LIBRARY & ARCHIVES

## Greenwich Historical Society Explores the Immigrant Experience in Fairfield County in Exhibition

*“An American Story: Finding Home in Fairfield County”*

On View: October 2 – January 6, 2020

*A celebration of the determination, resilience and courage of the human spirit*

Co-sponsored by the Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants and the  
Fairfield Museum and History Center

**COS COB, CT, September 10, 2019** – A diverse cross section of immigrants and refugees from five continents who came to Fairfield County seeking safety and opportunity is the focus of a dynamic exhibition that shines a spotlight on the human capacity for hope and perseverance. Organized originally by the Fairfield Museum and History Center and Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants (CIRI), and expanded by the Greenwich Historical Society, the exhibition opens October 2 and runs through January 6, 2020. Gallery hours are Wednesday through Sunday, noon – 4:00 pm.

Touching accounts of 10 immigrants’ often perilous journeys from Cambodia, Chile, Congo, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Hungary, India, Rwanda, Syria, and Venezuela are featured on dramatic banners suspended from the Historical Society’s museum gallery ceiling. A dynamic wall of historic and contemporary photos illustrates how many other individuals, including 12 immigrants to Greenwich from Chile, Italy, India, Mexico, Moldavia and the Soviet Union, have sought opportunity and added to the fabric of Fairfield County’s communities.

### Highlights:

- Maha Karamahad fled Syria with her young daughters when bombings from the civil strife became unbearable. With the help of volunteers, she now resides in Greenwich and works for Save the Children.  
*“I miss my country and my family. But I love that I have this chance to start again and rebuild my life. I am in the land of opportunities. My kids feel safe and are so happy. They’re back to normal life again.”*
- Born in Bogota, Colombia, Diana Venegas was only two when her parents emigrated to the U.S. to give her the opportunity for a better life. Raised in a one-bedroom apartment on Greenwich Ave, she attended Greenwich public schools and eventually transferred to Stamford High School. She joined the marine corps and is now about to graduate with a bachelor’s degree at U Conn Stamford.  
*“I learned how to play hockey at the Boys and Girls Club. It taught me to be tough and resilient, so I joined the Marine Corps to make my family proud. I was the first person in my family to serve in the U.S. military and will be the first to graduate with a bachelor’s degree. Everything my parents wanted for me will be achieved. They would have been comfortable living in Colombia, but they sacrificed their comfort for the opportunities in this beautiful country.”*
- Icli Zitella is a renowned musician who came to the U.S in 2012 to obtain his master’s at the Manhattan School of Music. He previously was a violinist with the National Philharmonic Orchestra of Venezuela and served as professor of Theory at Mozarteum-Caracas School of Music. Icli has a O1 Visa, given to individuals who demonstrate an extraordinary ability in their field. He lives with his family in Greenwich and works as a teacher and composer with premiers worldwide.  
*“Let me show you the lyrics of the liberty song. ‘In freedom, we are born, and in freedom, we will live. Our purses are ready. Steady, friends, steady. Not as slaves, but as freemen, our money we will give.’ We are victims of theocracies, communist system, totalitarianism. This*

*idea in the U.S. to be protected by the law is amazing. I think it is the most important contribution of the world civilization.”*

"An American Story: Finding Home in Fairfield County is a beautiful portrayal of the experiences of refugees and immigrants who have built new lives in Fairfield County," said Claudia Connor, President and CEO of the Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants (CIRI). "We premiered the exhibit at Fairfield Museum and History Center in 2018 in celebration of our 100th anniversary. Highlighting the story of so many immigrants and refugees was an extraordinary way to showcase the work CIRI has done since its founding in 1918 – and the importance of the work going forward."

"The exhibition recently won an Award of Excellence from the American Association for State and Local History for its achievement in civic engagement, as well as its preservation and interpretation of state and local history," continued Connor. "This is so validating for the many immigrants and refugees who have rebuilt their lives and created a sense of home in Connecticut. We are thrilled to bring An American Story to Greenwich in partnership with the Greenwich Historical Society and are excited to share new stories from the Greenwich community."

"I am inspired by this poignant and visually stunning exhibition of immigrants and refugees who risked everything to achieve a better life and, in the process, have enriched our lives here in Fairfield County," says Debra Mecky, Executive Director and CEO of the Greenwich Historical Society. "We are extremely grateful to the Fairfield Museum and History Center and CIRI for their partnership in enabling us to present and expand these stories to include more of our Greenwich neighbors. The theme is timely and aligns perfectly with our mission for strengthening the community's connection to our past, to each other and to our future."

Exhibition inspires fall programming:

**Special guided docent gallery tours are available Wednesdays and Saturdays at noon, or by appointment, beginning October 2nd.**

Additional perspective on the immigrants and refugees in the County will be provided by a series of programs this fall:

- **Fall Festival: Around the World!**

In honor of the exhibition, participants will enjoy Caribbean rhythms with the Carnival Trio and sing, clap, and dance their way through a journey of the Americas with Serious Coyote. Beautiful accessories will be on display from *Our Woven Community*, a Bridgeport-based program that provides local resettled refugee women economic opportunity by creating handbags, scarves and other items using locally donated materials, combined with fabrics from African countries to symbolize weaving of cultures. 100% of the proceeds benefit the artists and support program expenses.

**Saturday, October 12, noon to 4:00 pm** *Rain date is October 13*  
**\$25 per family or \$10 per adult, \$5 per child over 2**

- **The Global Refugee Crisis: Emerging Trends and Challenges**

Dr. Sarah Deardorff Miller, Senior Fellow, Refugees International, will discuss the global refugee situation and some of the largest displacement crises. She will consider why refugees are increasingly unwelcome and highlight how our local experience relates to the broader international system.

**Tuesday, October 22, 7:00 pm; Members \$10, Non-members \$15**

- **Story Barn: Finding Home**

The story-telling theme for this highly anticipated biannual event, will be on immigration and relocation and held in a cabaret-setting, expertly emceed by Bonnie Levison.

**Friday, November 15, 7:00 pm in the Barn; Members \$15, Non-members \$20**

- **Community Panel: *Creating Home: Non-Profits Supporting Settlement in Greenwich***

Panelists representing the wide range of organizations in town that work with refugees and immigrants will discuss the process and personal experiences and suggestions for how we can all support new members of our community. Whether they relocate them to new homes, provide services that help them acclimate to their new home, or provide support to children and access to community resources, each organization has been cited by individuals who have immigrated to Greenwich as having a deeply meaningful impact on their

transition. Vanderbilt Education Center. Confirmed panelists: Bobby walker Jr., Chief Executive Office of the Boys and girls Club of Greenwich, Mary lee Kiernan, President and CEO YWCA Greenwich, others TBD.

Light refreshments will be served.

**Wednesday, November 20, 6:00 - 8:00 pm. Members, \$10/ Non-members \$15**

- **Toddler Storytime**

Each week throughout the fall, seasoned educator Deborah Kupper will enchant our littlest listeners with traditional international folklore, songs, and movement.

**Wednesdays at 11:00 am.**

Additional digital images available on request

### **About Greenwich Historical Society**

Greenwich Historical Society was founded in 1931 to preserve and interpret Greenwich history to strengthen the community's connection to our past, to each other and to our future. The circa 1730 National Historic Landmark Bush-Holley House witnessed slavery and the American Revolution and became the site of Connecticut's first American Impressionist art colony from 1890 to 1920. Its landscape and gardens are restored based on documentation from the site's Impressionist era. The campus also includes a nationally accredited museum, library and archives, a museum store, café, and a community education center. Greenwich Historical Society educates thousands of school children annually and connects visitors to the history of this globally influential community through exhibitions, lectures, programs, and events. It receives no town funding and relies on donations and grants to continue its work in education and preservation. Learn more at [greenwichhistory.org](http://greenwichhistory.org).

### **About the Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants**

The Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants (CIRI) is a statewide nonprofit organization that assists refugees and immigrants in resolving legal, economic, linguistic and social barriers so that they become self-sufficient, integrated, and contributing members of the community. CIRI achieves this mission by providing a compassionate array of high quality legal, social and educational programming and by promoting cross cultural understanding and decent treatment for all. Each year CIRI assists close to 5,000 individuals from its offices in Bridgeport, Stamford and Hartford, providing transformative services for refugees, immigrants, survivors of torture and human trafficking. To learn more, please go to [www.cirict.org](http://www.cirict.org).

### **Media Contacts:**

Cai Pandolfino, Greenwich Historical Society, (203) 869-6899, [cpandolfino@greenwichhistory.org](mailto:cpandolfino@greenwichhistory.org)  
Laura McCormick, McCormick PR, (203)364-6357, [laura@mccormickpr.com](mailto:laura@mccormickpr.com)