

News release

For immediate Release: Sept. 28, 2016

Contact: Jennie Gartner (802) 236-8406

Rutland Welcomes celebrates refugee decision

RUTLAND - Rutland Welcomes, a grassroots group working to create a warm, safe, inviting atmosphere for refugees, heralded the U.S. State Department decision today to allow 100 refugees to make Rutland their home.

"Hundreds of Rutland Welcomes members stand ready to greet our new neighbors, ease their transition, and help them become happy and productive members of the greater-Rutland area," member Jennie Gartner said. "The compassion and love demonstrated by our membership over the past several months has helped sustain our enthusiasm and commitment as we have prepared to welcome the newest members of our community."

"We are excited to finally meet them and demonstrate the amazing spirit and deep empathy that is at the heart of this community, and the heart of Rutland Welcomes," Gartner said.

Rutland Welcomes is a grassroots group of individuals, created within hours of last spring's announcement that the city was under consideration as a refugee resettlement site. More than 1,000 people have joined Rutland Welcomes, serving on nearly two-dozen committees focused on everything from English tutoring and mentorship to collecting household items to outfit refugee families' apartments.

The group collected so much furniture and other items at its first donation drive that a second fall drive was postponed.

Carol Tashie, a Rutland City resident, local farmer and Rutland Welcomes member, said she was thrilled by the news on several levels.

"I sincerely believe this is the right thing to do. It is the right decision for Rutland and I know that our community will welcome and support our new neighbors as they move and settle into Rutland," Tashie said. "On a practical level, I think it will be good for the economy, will bolster the local housing market and our neighborhoods, and will add diversity that is so important for any community that wants to grow and thrive. It is a win-win situation for everyone."

Hunter Berryhill, a Rutland High School teacher, said refugee families would bring significant benefits to the local education system by adding diverse perspectives, bringing world affairs down to the local level, and encouraging students to learn about different cultures and ways of life.

"I'm very proud that Rutland City and its schools have earned the privilege to help our new neighbors, and I'm excited by the educational opportunities that refugee resettlement will bring," Berryhill said. "Our new families and students will benefit from new opportunities, while we, as a school community, will be enriched by their inclusion. It's one thing to learn about the Middle East from various media, but over time it will be quite another thing for students to hear firsthand from their new classmates about their experiences and perceptions."

To learn more about Rutland Welcomes, how to get involved or how to donate household items in the future, visit www.rutlandwelcomes.org.

###