

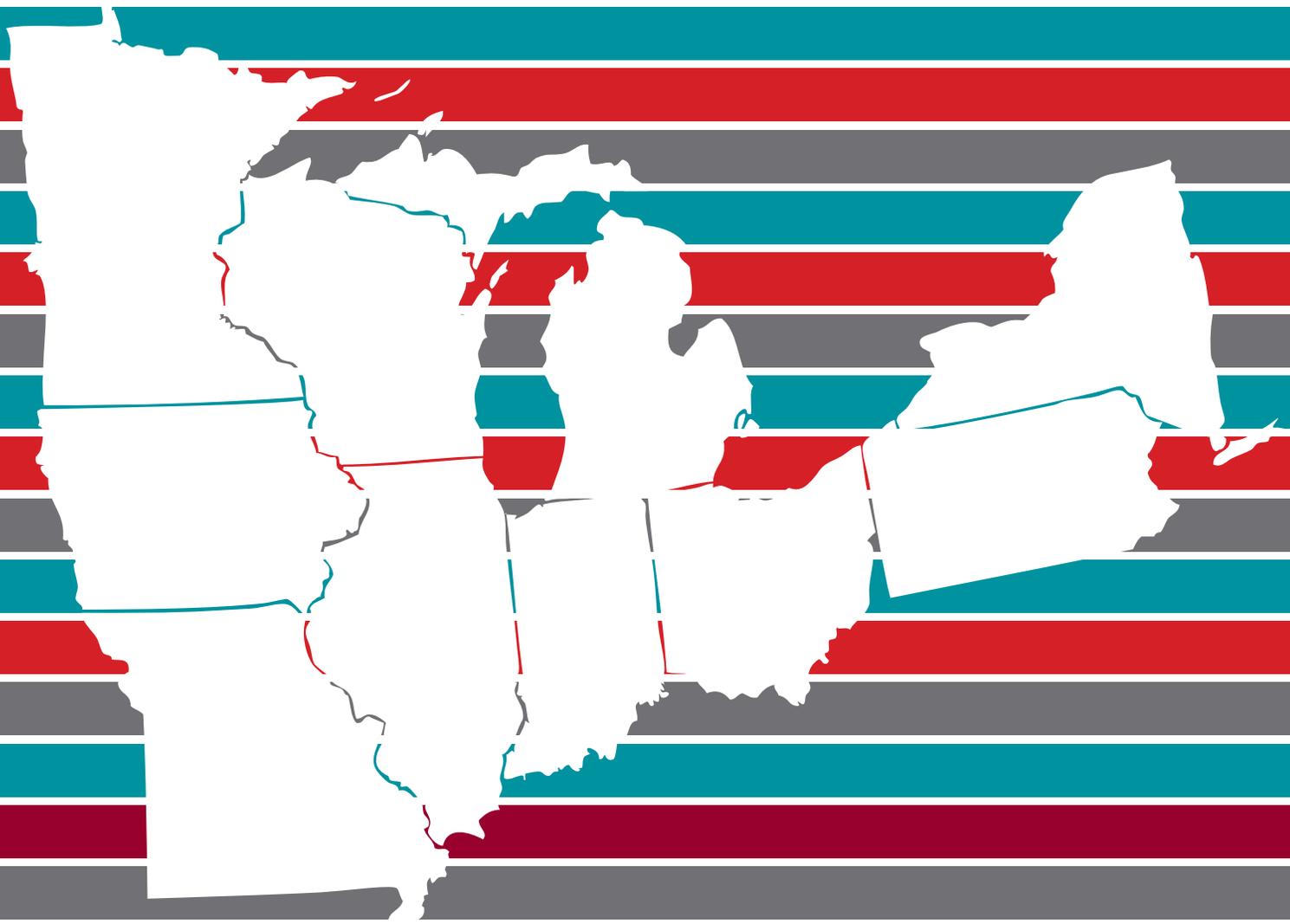
A Day in the Life of an Immigrant Entrepreneur

WELCOMING ECONOMIES

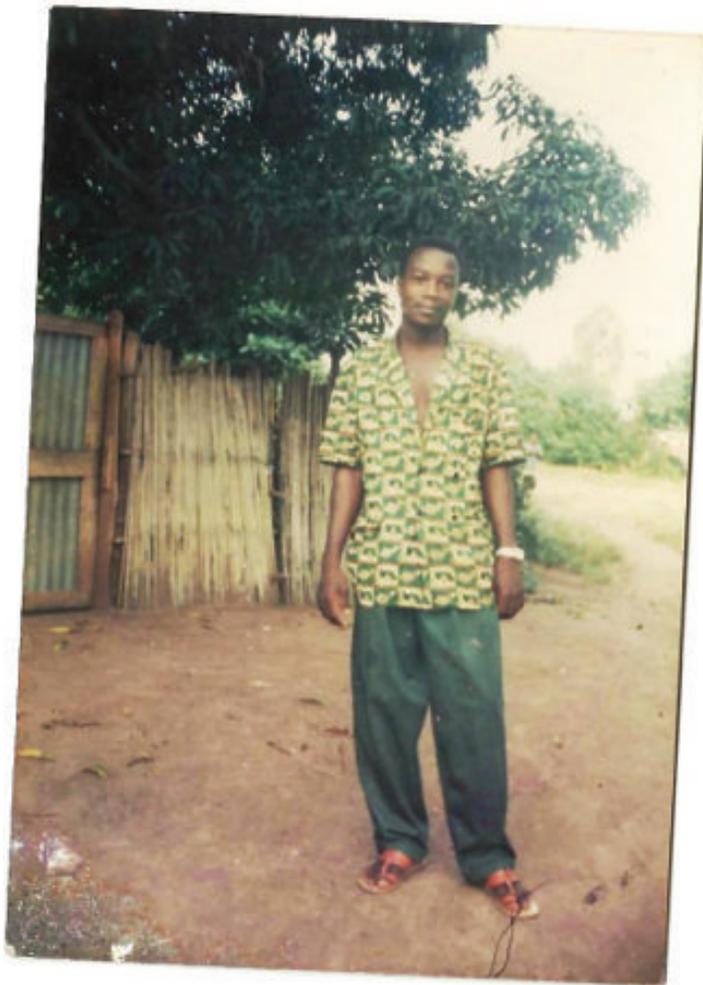
LEADING RUST BELT IMMIGRANT INNOVATION

**“...every aspect
of the American
economy has
profited from the
contribution of
immigrants.”**

- John F. Kennedy, *A Nation of Immigrants*



A Day in the Life of an Immigrant Entrepreneur



Global Network

LEADING RUST BELT IMMIGRANT INNOVATION

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America is a nation of immigrants

This book is a collection of the stories of immigrants and the contributions they are making to their families, friends, communities, and cities, from across the Midwest and Rust Belt.

The WE Global Network and New America Media partnered to gather and share these stories of immigrant entrepreneurs helping to rebuild America. The contest, "A Day in the Life of an Immigrant Entrepreneur," launched in October 2014 and asked for stories about immigrant entrepreneurs and their lives in an effort to spotlight the important role they play in our local economies.

Individuals living in all participating metropolitan regions submitted stories about immigrants who have started businesses and are contributing to the economic growth and prosperity of their communities. The stories submitted were written by the immigrant entrepreneurs themselves, or by others – family members, friends, colleagues, or customers – to celebrate the immigrant in their lives making a difference.

The participating regions were determined based upon metros where the WE Global Network has active relationships with local organizations that were willing to spearhead local outreach efforts. Participating regions include Chicago, Detroit, Lansing, Minneapolis–St. Paul, St. Louis, Buffalo, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia.

We hope you enjoy and are inspired by these stories, and we hope you will share them far and wide.

WE represents the “WE Global Network.” WE stands for our collaborative efforts as we build Welcoming Economies throughout the Rust Belt.



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National Statistics

More than 40% of Fortune 500 Companies were founded by immigrants or their children



These companies employ more than 10 million people



and generate revenues of \$4.2 trillion...



a number greater than the GDP of every country in the world except China, Japan, and the U.S.



• Immigrants are almost 2 times as likely to start a business as U.S. born residents



• 25% of American high-tech startups created between 1995 and 2005 were started by immigrants



• Immigrant-owned businesses pay out \$126 billion in payroll each year

Immigrant-owned businesses make up 28% of Main Street Businesses:

38% of all restaurants



58% of all dry cleaners



53% of all grocery stores



Immigrant Entrepreneurs and the Economy

Did you know?

- Immigrant-owned businesses make up **28 PERCENT OF MAIN STREET BUSINESSES**, including 58 percent of all dry cleaners, 53 percent of all grocery stores, 45 percent of all nail salons, 38 percent of all restaurants, and 32 percent of all clothing stores.
- Immigrants started **28 PERCENT** of new small businesses in 2011
- Immigrant-owned business pay out **\$126 BILLION** in payroll each year, employ **4.7 MILLION WORKERS**, and generate **\$800 BILLION** in sales
- **25 PERCENT OF AMERICAN HIGH-TECH START-UPS** created between 1995-2005 were started by immigrants
- Every foreign STEM worker with an advanced degree is estimated to create an additional **2.62 AMERICAN JOBS**

At the turn of the 20th Century, millions of immigrants arrived in America and were at the source of Midwestern industrial innovation that propelled America's industrial growth. These laborers and entrepreneurs contributed to the creation of Detroit automobiles, Pittsburgh steel, and other growth industries across America's manufacturing base, and they continue to be a significant part of the regions that serve as economic catalysts in today's world.

The decline of the industrial economy resulted in metropolitan regions across the Rust Belt experiencing slow or declining population growth and economic stagnation. This is due in large part to the loss of manufacturing jobs and the aging and out-migration of local populations. Many of these regions struggle with these issues still today.

Over the last half-decade, a movement of local immigrant-welcoming and immigrant-focused economic development initiatives has been created and is beginning to define a regional character and narrative around immigration that is distinct from the national debate about immigration reform. These initiatives are rooted in the fact that immigrant communities expand economic opportunities and revitalize regions. The Rust Belt region is well positioned to take advantage of immigration to reinvigorate its communities – to infuse local economies with new businesses and talent, to attract and retain newcomers, and to be competitive in the global economy.

**Stories of
immigrant
entrepreneurs
helping
to rebuild
America.**

**“I am
content.**

**I live the
American
dream.”**

The American Dream

PRANAV S. RAMANATHAN

Country of Origin: India

Company: Coacharya - Executive Coaching
 coacharya.com
 pranav@coacharya.com

Almost exactly 20 years ago, I began my journey to explore the American Dream. Today, I am a citizen, an entrepreneur, and a family man – born abroad, bred in America.

It began with one of many passage rites available for aspiring immigrants to ensure my place in the United States. Entry with a student visa was followed by a work permit, which later transitioned to residency and eventual citizenship.

The technical immigration process took 17 years on paper, whereas my social assimilation to the American culture, took perhaps a third of that time. This was made possible by the educational and career resources at my disposal, the endemic system of immigrant support, and the kindness and camaraderie of my native-born family and friends.

During this time I managed to live in four states and seven cities. I attended two universities and earned a bachelor's degree and a master's degree from each. I worked for three startups, two corporations and one non-profit.



My father, a business executive with a career spanning 40 years over three continents, chose to fulfill his talents by guiding others to fulfill their own. To formalize this concept, I agreed to partner with him, and our executive coaching practice, Coacharya, was born.

I am married to a fifth-generation American of Irish-German decent. I am a father to a U.S. born, multi-ethnic, 11-month-old daughter who will inevitably use her smile to change the world. Our rescue Shar-pei (also of mixed origins), reminds me on a daily basis that unconditional love and loyalty exist.

I am content. I live the American dream.

A version of this story originally appeared on Industrious Office - Chicago's blog. @IndustriousHQ.

**“I have
been more
successful
here than
I ever
dreamed.”**

Sala Thai: A Restaurant Oasis and the Man Who Built It

ARKOM "EDDIE" PRADITHAVANIJ

Country of Origin: Thailand

Company: Sala Thai Restaurants
salathai.us

Employees: 20

Years in business: 29



Arkom "Eddie" Pradithavanij was just a young man in his twenties, living in his native Thailand, when he made a momentous decision: although his father, a government employee, had sent him to college to become a teacher, Eddie decided he would put those plans on the back burner (literally, it would turn out) and follow his girlfriend to the United States.

Like most young immigrants, Eddie's first step was to get a job. He held a number of them over the years, taking whatever was available to him, from working at a gas station to food deliveries and restaurant work. He learned the inner workings of the restaurant industry, and in the early 1990's he opened Sala Thai Restaurant in Lafayette Park, Detroit. Several years later he moved to his present location, on Russell Street in Detroit's Eastern Market.

Eddie says the restaurant business is always risky, and as he has opened other Sala Thai locations around the region, he has found, as others have, that for unclear reasons some did much better than others. For now, he has settled on three locations in Detroit, Sterling Heights, and Shelby Township. With that number Eddie found he could maintain the finest quality food and highest level of service.

The phrase "sala thai" means "an oasis," or, "a place of rest," and this Thai concept is what Eddie wants to provide for both Thai and American people in search of excellent Thai food. He says, "Busy people want someplace they can rest their weary feet, eat good food, and quench their thirst. That is what they will get in my Sala Thai restaurants! We serve good, low-fat, healthy food, cooked quickly at high temperatures, always freshly made and very tasty." He adds, "Thai people believe the spices help improve blood circulation!"

“But I believe that if you work hard and treat people right, you can make it anywhere.”



Eddie has about twenty employees in his three establishments, not just family and friends, but also other immigrants from Southeast Asia, including some Hmong people, and a number of Americans as well. When asked if he might have been just as successful and done just as well if he had stayed in Thailand, he answers emphatically, “No, there are greater opportunities in the U.S. I have been more successful here than I ever dreamed. But I believe that if you work hard and treat people right, you can make it anywhere.”

Eddie Pradithavanij is a leading figure in Michigan’s Thai and Southeast Asian community, and a past officer and active member in the Thai-American Association of Michigan (TAAM). TAAM is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to helping Thai communities across the state, educating people about Thai culture, and assisting both Thai and American enterprises doing business in Thailand and Michigan. Eddie merges his personal and professional life in pursuing these goals. He has never turned away anyone who asked him for help, and goes beyond just giving advice to providing whatever is needed. Over the years, the young man who arrived here with his career plans on hold, knowing only his girlfriend, has become a successful, well-respected businessman, mentor, and father figure to other immigrants trying to get a foothold on success in America.

Does Eddie have any plans to retire? “Yes, some day I will certainly retire. And then I will open just a small carry-out place...”

Written by Dr. Su McKeithen-Polish

Fearless

ELESBAN GALLEGOS

Country of Origin: Mexico

Company: GM & Sons, Inc.
 gmandsons.com
 6784 Whitmore Lake Road,
 Whitmore Lake, Michigan 48189
 (734) 929-1259

Employees: 82
 Years in business: 23

Elesban Gallegos spent Thanksgiving Day watching the Detroit Lions win, surrounded by his family, waiting for the turkey to cook to perfection. Reflecting on one's blessings during the holiday season is nothing new. Elesban, born in 1943, grew up one of eight children of subsistence farmers in Senguio, Michoacan, Mexico. Michoacan certainly has much to offer in terms of natural beauty, culture, and history; it doesn't offer, however, much with regard to opportunities. This is true today, but was far more the case when Elesban was a young man. While he had a deep love for his family and for his pueblo, he understood early that a life lived attempting to make a living from the land was not for him. With that knowledge and with a blessing from his parents, Elesban left his pueblo at the age of 14 and made his way to Mexico City to seek out better prospects.

Upon his arrival in Mexico City, literally carrying nothing but a few clothes, Elesban found a position as a dishwasher. He initially survived by eating morsels of leftovers from the plates that he washed, but quickly, he showed his worth and versatility. He moved up: from a dishwasher, to a busboy, to a cook, to a waiter, and finally he became a bartender. It was in this role that

he was able to observe a different world, and it was this role that propelled him to move to the next phase of his path. Again, grateful for the opportunities that he was given, but ready for something more, Elesban, now 25 years old, set his sites on the United States. He crossed the United States and Mexico border at Brownsville, Texas in 1968.

Making his way from Texas, to Chicago, to Eau Claire, Michigan to Lansing, Michigan, Elesban again found himself constantly in motion and constantly experiencing change. He worked in restaurants in Texas and Chicago, and in a poultry processing plant in Eau Claire. Imagine navigating all of this change while understanding and speaking very little English!

It was in Lansing that Elesban felt he found a home and had a chance at success. In 1972, he began work at the Motor Wheel factory. While this job meant 10, 12, and 14 hours a day away from his wife and two children, he was satisfied because the wages were fair, the factory was unionized, it provided health benefits for his family, and it was steady work. Elesban purchased a small home near his workplace and settled in, planning to work for his employer until retirement, but in 1987, Elesban was laid off from Motor Wheel shortly before the company closed permanently. A man in his forties, with a new wife and two more small children, Elesban was now faced with the realities of the U.S. economy.

With no formal education, seeking employment in the late eighties was very different than at any time before. In the past, the willingness to work long and hard were credential enough to at least provide the chance at employment. With the rise of globalization, the manufacturing sector in the U.S. was beginning its decline. It was no longer as easy to secure a well-paid manufacturing position that would enable a breadwinner to care for his family. Elesban attempted to secure new employment with no success. Dented but not undaunted, Elesban reached for the three things that he could count on: his fearlessness, his willingness to work long and hard, and his network.



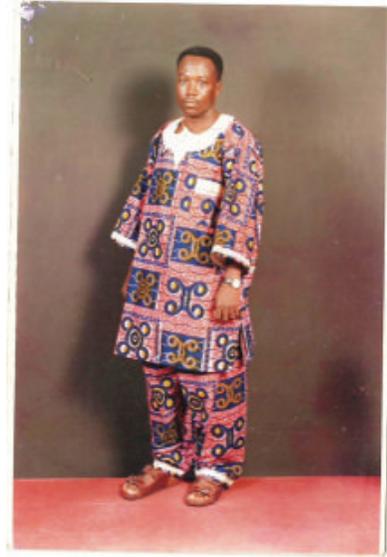
“Elesban reached for the three things that he could count on: his fearlessness, his willingness to work long and hard, and his network.”

Over the years, as Elesban moved from one pueblo to another, one country to another, and one job to another, he never forgot those who counted on him, or those who befriended him. Because of this, he built up and was a part of a cohesive enclave in both Lansing and Mexico whom he could reach out to for assistance. Having found no success in the job market, Elesban and a friend reached into their networks and began a cement construction business in 1990, and in 1992 it became GM & Sons, Inc. What began as a handful of men with a requirement to care for their families and with a driving desire to be successful has now grown into a multi-million dollar company with over 80 employees. Without a doubt, one of the key factors in the success of GM & Sons, Inc. is the large network that Elesban has created. Within this network is an understanding of the work ethic that is expected, coupled with Elesban’s reputation as honest, fair, and willing to work with those who are willing to take a chance on him as well.

There are so many lessons to be learned from this life story. Fearlessness. Forward-motion. Tenacity. But above all is an awareness and acceptance that no one can succeed alone. In every annual company meeting with his employees, and in his many conversations with his wife and children, Elesban humbly states that all success is due to everyone working towards it together. And this is true. But what Elesban does not fully take credit for is that it sometimes takes one person to step out, to take a chance, to provide a vision that others can believe in; this is what leaders and visionaries do. As he reflects upon his life in Lansing, it is hoped that he takes a bit of credit for all of the families that he has helped to sustain and grow over these last many years. It is hoped that he takes a moment to breathe in, and to embrace the true measure of the well-lived life that he has so fearlessly lived.

Authors: Angelica Gallegos, Ricky Gallegos, Hugo Gallegos, and Marisol Gallegos

English, education and employment: Cleaning the way for African Immigrants



FRANK DOGBE

Country of Origin: Togo

Company: SOS Building Services –
Commercial Cleaning
sosinc1.com

Office: (612) 886-1383

Cell: (612) 203-1812

frank@sosinc1.com

1422 West Lake Street Suite 202,
Minneapolis, MN 55408

Years in business: 10

Employees: 24

Frank Dogbe gives most of his new employees from West Africa a one-year promise.

Dogbe, founder and owner of SOS Building Services, a business that cleans commercial and office buildings, hires immigrants fresh from Africa and gives them one year to show him that they're well on their way to learning English or that they're working toward their GED.

"I want them to be inspired by my journey," Dogbe said. "I say to them: 'I started out like you when I came to this

country, even worse. I didn't have someone who spoke my language and was there to push me.'"

Dogbe is from Togo, a long, narrow country on the bottom side of Western Africa. There are far fewer Togolese than Somalis or Ethiopians who have settled in Minnesota, but those who have, surely have heard of Dogbe. In addition to hiring and mentoring new arrivals, he is the president of the Togolese Community of Minnesota.

Dogbe arrived in the U.S. with a Green Card and a fervent desire to stay. His first job was on the cleaning team at the St. Louis Park Target in 1999. He knew hard work, an education, and English fluency were the best places to start on that goal. He joined the local chapter of Toastmasters International, where he learned to speak in front of people and get feedback on his grammar and syntax. Later, he got his Bachelor's degree in accounting from Metro State University.

"I had a goal," he said. "I wanted to own my business."

In the actual running of a business, things are rarely simple. Dogbe started SOS in 2009. Five years later, business was booming, but some of the new accounts were huge buildings – more than 100,000 square feet, and he needed to get a loan for bigger, more powerful equipment to keep up. Dogbe approached his local U.S.



Bank, but his poor credit rating made a loan impossible. Though their hands were tied, the banker knew Dogbe was a credible candidate and so made a call to the Neighborhood Development Center's Director of Lending, Brian Singer.

In partnership with the Black Chamber of Commerce, NDC was able to offer Dogbe a loan to purchase equipment, and later another loan for working capital and payroll. His NDC loan officer Perla Mayo says he's ahead of schedule on his payments, and his credit score has improved considerably.

Dogbe and SOS Building Services were the perfect candidates to receive assistance from NDC's newly launched Business Expansion Program— an initiative to expand its business assistance services, including loan capital offerings to better meet the particular needs of existing businesses poised for growth.

Business has been very good. Working mostly in Minneapolis' Uptown area, glowing word-of-mouth

references have kept him busy and allowed him to hire more employees. NDC's Business Lab is in the process of providing him with a new logo and website and advice on how to attract and manage more business opportunities.

Sitting behind his desk, monitoring three computers at his home in North Minneapolis, Dogbe manages the SOS payroll, pays invoices and oversees his 24 employees. But when a hire is just starting out, or there's a new building to clean, Dogbe is there— collecting trash, vacuuming, cleaning toilets— alongside his staff, and speaking English.

"I work to motivate them," he said. "By working hard and doing it right, we have a job. If we don't do it right, we don't work. It's simple."

A version of this story was previously published by the Neighborhood Development Center.

Written by Emily Blodgett, Director of External Communications

Entrepreneurialism and the Human Touch

JULIO ZEGARRA-BALLON

Country of Origin: Peru

Company: Zee Bee Market LLC – World Market
zeebeemarket.com
3211 South Grand Blvd.,
St. Louis, MO 63118

Employees: 3

Years in business: 3

Earlier this month, I had an incredible experience. It showed me how lucky I am and why I love living in America. I've called St. Louis my home for the last 17 years, and this is where I opened the doors to Zee Bee Market, in one of my favorite neighborhoods, South Grand. My store offers beautifully hand-crafted and Fair Trade products from around the world. My business gives the artisans behind these products a better life.

I first came to the U.S. from Peru in 1990. The U.S. is truly the land of opportunity. Had I lived in Peru after graduating from college, I would not have been afforded the same resources and possibilities to continue to learn and grow as I found here in this country.

In 1998 I moved to St. Louis after a promotion at work and I love this city! In 2009 I connected with Partners for Just Trade, a local organization that connects artisans living in extreme poverty and consumers in North America. Many of these artisans are from Peru. Soon, I



was volunteering, selling their products and involved with Fair Trade at the local and national level.

Fair Trade is a producer-centered supply chain model. It provides workers a fair wage and guarantees healthy, positive and safe work environments. Through Fair Trade, I'm able to provide opportunity to many talented artisans by opening markets for their products here in St. Louis.

I built a career in retail and gained invaluable experience in buying, merchandise planning, and marketing. I also completed an MBA at the University of Missouri St. Louis, and my entrepreneurial spirit rose to a new level which helped me launch my business.

The support of my family has been incredible. My wife was born in the U.S., but we met and got married in Peru. She's been a friend, an advisor, and my biggest fan, from giving feedback on the logo selection to choosing paint colors for the store. Both our daughters inspire me to pursue my goals. Our oldest, Marcela, has said "I am so inspired by how driven you are Papa, seeing you pursue your own dreams makes me feel like it's possible for me to also follow mine no matter the circumstances." It warms my heart to see my children appreciate hard work as an important factor in making their dreams a reality.

In June of 2012, I started my small business as a mobile retail operation. I attended farmers markets, events and festivals around St. Louis. A few months later, I launched my online store. Immediately, people from all over town gravitated to Zee Bee Market and started asking for a storefront.

The nature of handmade products typically prevents people from ordering online because they know their purchase won't match the product photo exactly. We carry beautiful products that sell best when the consumer can touch and feel what they are getting. This fueled my desire to open a brick-and-mortar store.

After doing some research, I concluded the thriving South Grand commercial area would be a good home for my store. Retail spaces are not readily available so I enlisted the help of the local Community Development Agency. I found the place, and it needed quite a bit of work, but I knew I could make it into the beautiful and welcoming store it is today.

South Grand is already an international restaurant destination, a testament to St. Louis welcoming people from around the world and being a stronger community for it. Immigrant business owners make this possible; their entrepreneurial spirit prevails despite the language and cultural barriers. St. Louisans appreciate and value products and services that transport them to foreign places without ever leaving home. I'm proud to be an immigrant business owner that connects people in this city with unique, handcrafted products from around the world.

The new store means so much to me. It's not just about making more sales. I have the ability to bring more Fair Trade to more people in St. Louis. I printed out beautiful posters that explain the Fair Trade principles so customers can see the impact their purchases make in the lives of countless producers. It's about creating a better world. It's about giving talented artists a chance for a better life. With this new store, I can work with more artisans and have a bigger impact on the economies around the world and right here in St. Louis.

I'm extending the Fair Trade philosophy to my employees, too. If I support Fair supply chain practices that protect artisans, I should pay a fair wage to my employees. I believe this creates trust and develops commitment to the employer. I would love to have sales associates who want to stay with Zee Bee Market for years and can share my passion for socially conscious shopping.

Initially, I am hiring two or three part-time employees. If sales exceed expectations, I would like to hire a store manager and then have two part-time sales associates.

To me, being an entrepreneur is about having the power to build a business that makes a difference and about doing something unexpected. Zee Bee Market does that. Most of the things we buy are mass-produced, and customers don't get any say in how they were manufactured or how the people that made them were treated. Fair Trade items are hand-made, and they stand for equality. They stand for dignity. They stand for beauty.

In my business, a website isn't enough. I don't have a digital product at the core of my business. That stands out as the world gets more dependent on computers, harvesting big data and automation. I'm investing in people all over the world, their talent, and an experience rooted in the human touch.

My Business I Dreamt Of

ZELALEM GEMMEDA

Country of Origin: Ethiopia

Company: Ethiopian Abyssinia Cuisine at West Side Bazaar
westsidebazaar.com/bazaar_kitchen
(716) 563-6602

Years in Business: 3



Refugees aren't born to be refugees. There are so many causes that make a person flee from their country, including wars, social economics, and more. Like many of them, I became a refugee from Ethiopia because of the death of my parents - especially my father's, and other related reasons. The major change in my way of life, and my unmet desire for higher education left me depressed, and I had no choice but to leave my home to find relief from the painful memory of losing my family. I wanted to start a new life. I wanted to live anonymously with new people, and have a new lifestyle. At the time, I thought a new life was the only solution that enabled me to live without the constant, painful memory of the death of my mother, father, and only brother.

My first trip to Yemen as a refugee did not bring me relief of my painful grief, and it was a challenge to face a new way of life. In the refugee camp I met my husband, also an Ethiopian refugee forced to flee because of political reasons. One and a half years later we officially started our life together with a move to Sana'a, the capital city of Yemen, with a house and a bed for us to sleep in - which I never thought we would have again. I thought that living in the camp was going to be my role for the rest of my life.

In Sana'a we faced struggles finding jobs, especially as new citizens. Soon enough, however, my husband got a restaurant job, and I stayed home to raise our child for one year because childcare was not available to me at that time, before going to work in the same restaurant as my husband.

A year later, I got the chance to attend a computer class while being sponsored by the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) for six months. Two years later, the International Corporation for Development (ICD) hired me as a data clerk, and I worked there for three years.

Shortly before this job ended, the restaurant my husband and I were working in was closing, and we were able to acquire the space through an auction and open our Ethiopian Restaurant. I hired four employees to help run



the business, and assisted in management, customer service, and as a cashier.

Our Ethiopian Restaurant was expensive: rent was three times that of similar businesses in the area because of the auction bid, and four employees' salaries and inventory expenses kept me busy. It wasn't an easy job for me to manage our business; it required hard work, various marketing strategies, and strong customer service skills to draw in more guests to not only cover our expenses, but also achieve a profit. We worked hard towards becoming the best local Ethiopian restaurant.

After running the restaurant for five years, my family received a resettlement opportunity to move to America. The first thing I wanted to do: pursue an education. I attended Erie Community College and graduated with an associate's degree in Liberal Arts and Science as an honor student. I initially continued for a Registered Nurse degree, but after one year decided to redirect and find a way to provide for my children's education and tackle other living expenses.

My choice to own a restaurant wasn't simple: the high costs and many requirements to maintain a kitchen to health and safety standards left me believing I would never get the chance to own a restaurant in America. I gave first priority to my children's future, and the expenses of supporting a family and paying for education didn't leave enough money for the business I dreamed of.

I'd been living in America eight years when one day I decided to visit the West Side Bazaar. It was a small store, and I met a lady working there, and I asked her if they have programs that could help me open my restaurant. She said she didn't think so, but she knew that they were looking to expand their business with more vendors. I gave her my information, and three months later I received a call asking if I was still interesting in running a restaurant. I was so excited, and I told him, "Yes!"

After nine months filled with looking at places to rent and completing the licensing process, I finally opened my Ethiopian Abyssinia Cuisine at West Side Bazaar. I received much support and am grateful to Westminster Economic Development Initiatives for helping me.

After all of those years of struggle, my family and I have become successful in life. My husband now works in the Buffalo Marriott Hotel and Adam's Mark Hotel as a cook. My business is picking up, and it is becoming famous in town for having some of the best Ethiopian cultural food. My oldest son is in his senior year at Colgate University, and my younger daughter is a sophomore at The Park School of Buffalo.

Political Refugee Kyaw Swar Oo Opens the First Burmese Food Store in Cleveland

KYAW SWAR OO

Country of origin: Burma

Company: Burmese Asian Market
13439 Detroit avenue, Lakewood OH 44107
(216) 912-8477
burmeseasianmarket@gmail.com

Years in business: 1

Kyaw Swar Oo, a Burmese refugee who arrived in the United States in 2004, is a man living his dream. In October 2013, he opened his own business, the Burmese Asian Market, the first Burmese store in Cleveland. Today, Oo is still growing his initiative and not quite able to support himself entirely. He continues to work daily as a sushi chef from 7:30 a.m. until 11:30 a.m., after which he visits the Burmese Asian Market for an hour, where his wife works as the shopkeeper. He then spends the rest of his day as an Uber driver until 8:00 or 9:00 p.m., which gives him an opportunity to meet interesting people, and to tell them about his store. He spends his only day off, Saturday, with his wife and two-year-old daughter.

After obtaining political asylum in 2004 for his activist work for democracy and against the military junta in Burma, Oo lived and worked in sushi bars in New York, Los Angeles, and San Diego. He moved to Cleveland

in 2011, where he became a franchisee for AFC Sushi located in a Giant Eagle, a supermarket chain.

Though earning well, Oo dreamt of opening his own business. He was determined to fulfill the timeline that he had set out for himself: he would be an employee in his 20s in order to acquire the knowledge, skills, and vision needed to be an entrepreneur; he would open his own business in his early 30s, and grow it and make it successful in his mid- and late 30s. He tirelessly worked to make his dream come true.

Soon after moving to Cleveland, he sold his AFC Sushi franchisee' share in order to open the Burmese Asian Market in Lakewood, a Cleveland neighborhood with a large Burmese community. According to Eileen Wilson from Building Hope in the City, an organization which welcomes and partners with refugees and immigrants, there are currently around 1,500 Burmese in Cleveland, 80 percent living in Lakewood.

Building the business wasn't an easy process for Oo. It took him a full year, between finding his space to rent and opening the store in October 2013, mostly due to the need to obtain multiple City Hall Permits. He had to learn everything from scratch: from architectural planning, and purchasing and installing adequate shelves, to buying equipment, designing the store's logo, and marketing it. He was rejected multiple times for the licenses that he applied for, but while many people would be discouraged, Oo was not. He had a plan and he was determined to succeed, no matter the obstacles.

The Burmese entrepreneur had a limited budget for his project, generated primarily through selling his AFC Sushi shares. Because of the startup nature of his business, Oo couldn't get any loans to help him in the process. Instead, to sustain himself and his project, he worked as a chef at a sushi bar, and remained a franchisee at a sushi stand.

Oo was creative in his acquisition of the equipment and food supplies he needed. He purchased the freezers and coolers on Craigslist, and found used shelves from a department store. Initially, he got food from a

Burmese market in Akron, a city near Cleveland with a considerable Burmese population, and a Chinese market. These options were extremely expensive, however, and he quickly reached his already restricted budgetary limits. Oo identified two affordable options to purchase the food, the Chicago Burmese and Chinese Warehouses, but was ineligible for a bank loan, and unsure of what to do next.

It was a fortuitous moment for Oo to encounter a representative from the Economic Community Development Institute (ECDI), a Columbus-based organization that provides financial literacy and microenterprise development training courses and

microcredit to local and immigrant business owners. The ECDI representative was impressed with Oo's initiative and, after connecting him with Neighborhood Housing Services to address some unresolved credit issues and develop a solid financial plan, provided him a much needed loan.

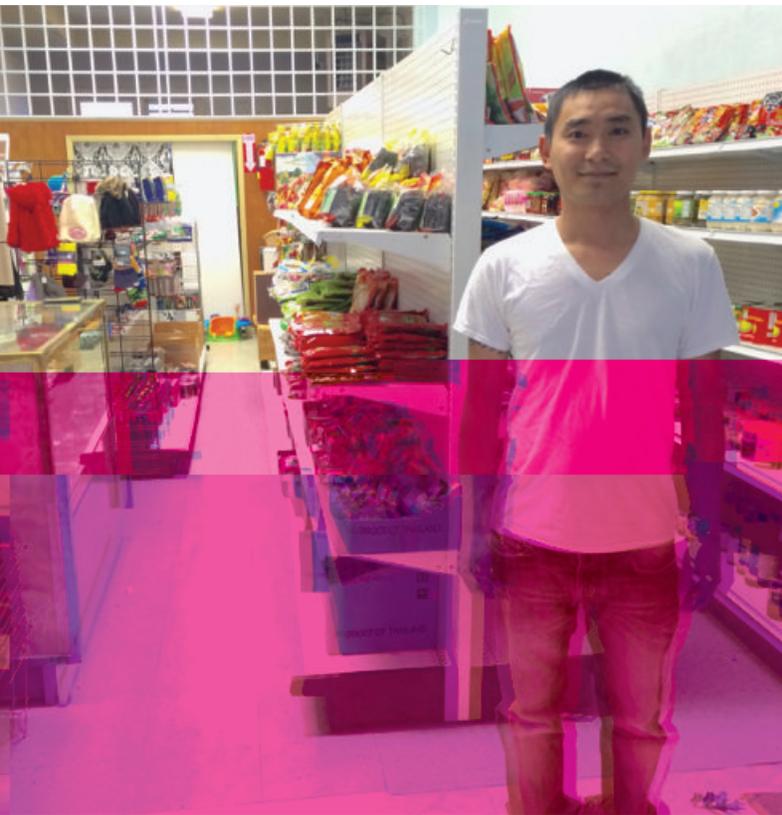
With the loan, Oo was able to purchase food supplies from the abovementioned Chicago Warehouses, as well as import them from Thailand where they were even less expensive. His store carries traditional Burmese and Asian food and clothing, as well as U.S. products to appeal to a broader customer base.

While the Market was originally opened with the Burmese community in mind, the many American customers have pleasantly surprised Oo. The latter must be drawn by a preexisting interest in Asian culture and cuisine, visiting the website - which is promoted on the Lakewood neighborhood's webpage, or by sheer curiosity to explore while passing by.

The Burmese entrepreneur's current goals are to make the Market flourish and to open the first Burmese restaurant in Cleveland. His biggest life objective, however, is to earn enough money to be able to offer his daughter a good life and access to quality education, so that she can pursue any profession she chooses.

Oo feels fully integrated in U.S. society and embraces its core values. He mostly appreciates the respect for the rule of law, and the fact that everyone has the opportunity to be successful through hard work.

Written by Raluca Besliu



“He had a plan and he was determined to succeed, no matter the obstacles.”

The Road Map to Success as an Entrepreneur

BOUNTHANH PHOMMASATHIT

Country of Origin: Laos

Companies: Diversified Health Management
dhmcorp.net
Employees: 93
Years in Business: 11

Workline Solutions, Inc.
Employees: 150
Years in Business: 4

In late 1979, sponsored by the Trinity Lutheran Church, my family came to Columbus, Ohio from Laos through a refugee camp in Thailand. We were a young family with two toddlers. Our first house was in Bexley, Ohio, where we raised two young sons as working parents. While we were working full time, we also enrolled at the Columbus State Community College, and joined Capital University where I earned a Bachelor of Social Work while my husband attended Ohio State University.

From 1980 to 2012, I secured a job as a social worker at Franklin County Jobs & Family Services, where I had the opportunity to serve thousands of Southeast Asian refugees with resettlement in their new land and in their new culture in Columbus. While my husband and I were working and continuing our education, I earned a Master's Degree in Science and Human Services Management at Franklin University, and our sons



attended Ohio University and entered the workforce shortly after their graduation in 2000.

To make a long story short, as a former refugee family and a bombing survivor, we have never thought our dreams would come true. My family owns Diversified Health Management, Inc. and Workline Solutions in Columbus, where my two sons, Alexander and Christopher, are CEOs of the companies.

On March 12, 2004, Diversified Health Management Inc. was established. Originally, we launched a non-profit organization to assist with the social service needs of Southeast Asian refugees during their resettlement process. With work being done on a volunteer basis and a lack of funding, however, a group of members decided to establish for-profit companies to ensure that communities on the east side of Columbus receive

needed services that could be subsidized by Medicare, Medicaid, and other private health insurance companies.

Alexander S. Phommasathit was chosen to be the Chief Executive Officer of the company, and began shadowing another local home health agencies to better understand regulations and procedures. In late 2009, the business received accreditation from the Joint Commission and began taking Medicaid, Medicare, and private insurances patients.

Today, the agency has grown from serving 15 to almost 200 home health patients who reside throughout Central Ohio, and is Minority Business Enterprise (MBE)/Encouraging Diversity, Growth and Equity (EDGE) certified. DHM employs 93 people and is working on expanding its scope to include transportation, behavioral health, and substance abuse through the Driving Intervention Program (DIP). In addition, DHM is working on the creation of licensable home-health software. In 2014, sales of Diversified Health Management totaled \$1.8 million.

In 2006, Christopher Phommasathit established Workline Solutions, Inc. Workline Solutions is an employment/ staffing service agency which employs 150 people and had gross sales of \$1.9 million in 2014. Workline recruits potential employees from homeless shelters, halfway house facilities, and minority communities to provide opportunities for the most vulnerable populations facing extreme difficulty getting hired. Workline provides transportation assistance with locations to pick up and drop off.

In conclusion, the above companies will continue to grow and bring goods, services, and socioeconomic growth to Ohio for the years to come, with an income projection of at least \$4 - 5 million per year.



Like Father, Like Son: Dr. Ayman Salem Brings Family Values to Aerospace Science

DR. AYMAN SALEM

Country of Origin: Egypt

Company: Materials Resources LLC
ICMRL.net
facebook.com/ICMRL

Employees: 5
Years in business: 5



Every day starts with a reminder: my 6,000-mile leap from Giza, Egypt to Dayton, Ohio is thanks in large part to the many giants on whose shoulders I stood to reach my dreams.

The biggest giant of all was my father. As a blue-collar worker and a dedicated family man, he had three jobs to make ends meet while pursuing a Bachelor's of Science in civil engineering at the age of 43. His biggest influence on me, however, was what he did to send me to America. My long immigration process almost came to a halt just two nights before my Master's thesis defense at Cairo University in 1998.

Dad was hospitalized with permanent kidney failure. I spent the night on the floor of his hospital room. I tried to hide my worries, reflect courage, and extend hope to the giant who taught me the meaning of strength. With one week left before my flight to America for a research

assistantship, and just a few hours before my thesis defense, I made up my mind to cancel my trip. Dad always put family first, and I wanted to be like him. The following day, I felt like I was sleepwalking through my entire thesis presentation. Afterwards, however, I raced to his hospital bed to say, "Dad, you and I succeeded! My degree was only possible by your support." His proud smile and bear hug made my day.

Afterwards, the doctor asked to speak privately with me. I learned that my father refused to receive further treatment until I traveled to America for my Ph.D. Forcing me to pursue my dream at such a time couldn't have been easy, but Dad always put his family first. These days, I apply the same "family first" value with my employees. Worrying about their next paycheck, their mental state at work, and their career growth keeps me awake many nights.

So, in 1998, I arrived at Drexel University in Philadelphia motivated to learn, succeed, and honor my family. While finishing my Ph.D., I was in constant contact with my family in Giza, and I shared every little accomplishment with my father. His work ethic inspired me to seek excellence in my own research. He always said, "Your work is a gift for God, and He sees everything." Perhaps that is why he always insisted on using high quality wood in the hidden areas of his handmade furniture. This work ethic paid off: a world-renowned titanium scientist offered me a job with a research team in Dayton, Ohio. Shortly thereafter in 2002, I earned my Ph.D. Hearing my Dad's proud voice on the phone was my real reward.

I never missed a week without hearing his voice. During one phone call in 2003, my Dad barely managed to say, "Come home, son." Without hesitation, I was on the first plane to Cairo. Dad was fighting for his life after a doctor's mistake during surgery. When I rushed to his bed, he whispered to my stepmom, "I told you he would come."

Then he fell into a coma with a smile on his face. That experience taught me how a family's emotional connection can provide so much strength, and I use it every day with my employees. I try to sympathize with their personal fights and provide my support whenever I can.

Eventually, the doctors discovered that Dad had too many fluids in his system. After two dialysis treatments, he was sitting up in bed, smiling. He gave me a big bear hug and whispered that I should get back to work, and not let his illness distract me from success.

Joyful with his recovery, I continued my work in America. Another phone call years later brought me back to my father's hospital bedside. This time, things were worse: Dad could only move his head slightly when he heard my daughter's voice. But the look on his face gave us peace. He taught me that reflecting peace allows the rest of the family to act rationally. I try to set the same example to my employees as they navigate challenges.

I received a phone call from my lawyer while I was waiting on my father. I had earned permanent residency in America as an outstanding scientist. I spoke the good news in Dad's ear, hoping he would open his eyes. I returned to America to secure my immigration, intending to fly back to Giza to stay with my dad as long as needed. But my plans were shattered with a 3:00 a.m. phone call that brought me to my knees. I missed saying goodbye to my father—my best friend, my coworker, and my hero.

Every day, I try to live up to my father's legacy and prove that his sacrifices paid off. The echo of my dad's voice motivated me to start a company in 2009. I started Materials Resources in my living room, and then moved to a small room in my house. With the hire of my first full time employees, I moved to an office space that was shared with other companies.

After two years of talking to customers about the value of Materials Informatics, I got my first break from a jet engine manufacturer. I leased a state-of-the-art microscope. I moved to a bigger space in an entrepreneurship incubator, hired more employees, and set up a metals characterization laboratory. Today, Materials Resources has several patents pending and more than 800 citations of my scientific articles. Now, it is my turn to offer my shoulders to my daughter, my employees, and every person striving for their dreams by demonstrating the importance of education and hard work in all that I do.

Just before I close my eyes every day, I whisper to the immigrant at heart who never made it to America, "I hope I made you proud, Papa!"

A Busy Day, Worth Every Minute

KAYODE MALOMO

Country of Origin: Nigeria

Company: Atlas Commu9.7Tc cs 1 pa m 19g'v1As v1Av1 cs (v1A) .e

For a second, I stare at my desk, looking at the picture of President Bill Clinton and I earlier this month at the 2030 Clinton Global Initiative. CGI addresses the challenges of the next generation and prepares business and government leaders and industry innovators for roles as global leaders of tomorrow. I remember President Clinton's words 14 years ago during his trip to Nigeria, which I watched on my black and white TV set in Nigeria as a college student. He said, "For a nation to be great, it must be greater than the sum of its individual parts." I was deeply motivated by these words. 14 years later, I shared these same words that inspired me with him. As he patted me on the back, he said, "Wow, you still remember that? You know, the same is still true today for nations, for businesses, and for individuals."

After completing my MBA at Temple's Fox School of Business in 2012, I decided to dedicate my life to helping businesses and individuals succeed and maximize their potential. I've had an amazing journey as an immigrant in the U.S. since I relocated to Philadelphia to further my education about a decade ago.

growth and increased sales. I go over next quarter targets with the team and recommend bonuses for our top performers.

At 7 am, I have my weekly one-hour project management call with my team currently working in Maryland. The assignment is a multi-million dollar logistics management project for a big telecom company that has saved the client almost \$150 million nationwide. I receive an email from Accenture explaining that my team attained the fastest deployment nationwide for a second time. When I inform my team, everyone is very excited and motivated. I let them know dinner is on me after work.

It's 8:15 am now, and I quickly drop off my four and five year old children at school. We chat about their art projects along the way.

At 9 am, I arrive at the office of the healthcare company I consult for in Fairmont Park, where I oversee a program that helps people with disabilities become gainfully employed. It is very rewarding and challenging at the same time. I meet with a potential employer to advocate for an individual in the program. With one more job secured this morning, we are at 90 percent success rate of matching our intakes with the right employers.

It's 12 noon now, and I feel hungry, so I drive down to Kilimanjaro Restaurant in West Philly for lunch. I order my favorite lamb special which really tastes good. Over lunch, I chat with a friend who is starting a new business, go over his two-page executive summary, and make some recommendations on accessing citywide resources.

At 1 pm I return back to the office responding to emails from clients. At 2:15 pm, I receive a call from an unknown number on my cell phone, which I pick up anyway. It's a client whom I helped complete his grant application for the merchant fund a while back. He calls to say thank you as the grant has been approved for \$10,000.

It's 4 pm now, and I go to the conference room to meet with my team at When in Need (WiN) Foundation, a Philadelphia based non-profit where I volunteer. WiN awards educational scholarships to disadvantaged youths

and addresses preventive health issues in Africa and the United States. We approve four scholarships for youth at four different schools in Philadelphia and decide to make the donations at the schools next Tuesday. I also give a progress report on a new community water system and school building WiN has just helped rebuild in Eastern Nigeria that accommodates 100 students.

I look up, and it's 5:30 pm. I quickly drive down to Courage Center in Overbrook Park where I teach an art class to help children develop their creative abilities, understand money management and entrepreneurship. Today I am teaching about 20 students (ages four to twelve) how to make collage paintings and t-shirts. We all vote on the best shirt, which earns a \$20 gift card from me. The kids are really excited, and it's a high point of my day even though I am tired. After an hour painting, we come together as a group and make one big piece themed "Peace, Love and Happiness." The kids love it and recommend we hang it in the hallway, which we do.

By now, it's 7:30 pm. I drive home with my two boys and wife, who have been part of the art class as well. Over dinner we crack jokes and recap each person's day. After this, I take a quick shower and get a little rest while watching my son's favorite program, "Octonauts" on the Disney Channel.

It's 9 pm, and I am dozing off a little, ready to retire for the night. Suddenly, a thank you text hits my phone from a happy client, which simply says, "Thank you for all your help. The bank has approved our financing." It made my day. The signature line of the text is Aristotle's quote: "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit." I fully agree. My life is about giving back. A busy day, but worth every minute.

Two Paths One Dream

LAVENDER WACHIRA AND MAY LEBOO

Country of Origin: Kenya

Company: MayLav Elite Cleaning
maylav-cleaners.squarespace.com

Number of employees: 5
 Years in business: 2



We are May Leboo & Lavender Wachira, and we are the faces behind MayLav Elite Cleaning, a residential, commercial, post-construction and party/event cleaning company.

May was raised in a small farm town called Kitale, also known as the granary of Kenya because of the large-scale maize/corn farming they do. Lavender was raised in Nairobi, Kenya's Capital -we like to describe it as mini New York.

May left Kenya in 2004 to pursue a degree in communications at Point Park University in Pittsburgh PA. She enjoyed the experience that a new city brought and was happy to start a new life here. Lavender was working in Kenya for a few years after her undergraduate degree and decided to pursue an MBA to further her career, and incidentally picked Point Park University.

We met on campus in 2009, and a friendship sparked instantly. May had also decided to pursue her master's degree, and we continued to forge our friendship in class.

After graduating we sought employment in order to experience working in corporate America. We worked for two years and that gave us the experience, capital and confidence needed to start our own business.

We live in two different parts of Pittsburgh, Lavender in the West End and May the East End, which is good because it has allowed us to understand and anticipate the needs in the neighborhoods we reside in.

The Day...

A typical MayLav Day would probably start at 5 a.m. with us messaging each other back and forth over ideas that we may have. We brainstorm over them, knock some of them off but keep the ones that are more feasible. We then discuss jobs, walk-through appointments, pick-up times, or meet-up times, and which crew member is available. Then probably complain about the cold. See, we grew up in a country with only two seasons: rainy and dry season. Several years of being in Pittsburgh and we are yet to get used to the chill.

The Job...

At the job site, the first thing we do is carry the equipment and supplies in and then assign floors or rooms if necessary. For the next three to four hours our interaction is minimal, as everyone is busy, except of course, for the occasional approval or disapproval of a song choice. We like to play music as we work. Something about music, the right tempo and energy gives us drive and keeps our spirits up as we work. When we are done cleaning, we do a final walk-through and make sure everything is sparkling and that we haven't left anything out of place.

After the Job...

We head home, change out of our uniform into business casual attire, and visit a potential client at their site for a prescheduled walk-through to establish



LAVENDER WACHIRA AND MAY LEBOO



EDDIE AND KANCHANIJ PRADITHAVANIJ



DR. AYMAN SALEM AND HIS DAUGHTER SARA

About Us



WE Global Network, a project of Welcoming America in partnership with Global Detroit, is comprised of over a dozen regional economic development initiatives from across the Midwest working to tap into the economic development opportunities created by immigrants.

WE GLOBAL NETWORK

The WE Global Network is a regional Network of immigrant economic development organizations working in cities and regions across the Midwest. The Network is designed to strengthen the work, maximize the impact, and sustain the efforts of individual local initiatives across the region that welcome, retain, and empower immigrant communities as valued contributors to local economies. The Network, a project of Welcoming America in partnership with Global Detroit, is comprised of over a dozen regional economic development initiatives from across the Midwest working to tap into the economic development opportunities created by immigrants.

The mission of the WE Global Network is to strengthen the work, maximize the impact, and sustain the efforts of local economic and community development initiatives across the region that welcome, retain, and empower immigrant communities as valued contributors to the region's shared prosperity.

The Network is made up of local organizations that operate in a 10-state region including: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

Local organizations participating in the Network benefit from peer-to-peer learning exchanges, increased publicity, policy and research tools developed for immigrant economic development organizations, access to technical assistance, and other capacity-building resources.

weglobalnetwork.org

NEW AMERICA MEDIA

New America Media (NAM) is the country's first and largest national collaboration and advocate of more than 3,000 ethnic news organizations. Over 57 million ethnic adults connect to each other, to home countries and to America through 3,000+ ethnic media outlets, the fastest growing sector of American journalism.

Founded by the nonprofit Pacific News Service in 1996, NAM is headquartered in California with offices in New York and Washington D.C., and partnerships with journalism schools to grow local associations of ethnic media.

NAM is dedicated to bringing the voices of the marginalized - ethnic minorities, immigrants, young people, members of LGBT communities, and elderly people - into the national discourse. The communities of the New America will then be better informed, better connected to one another, and better able to influence policy-makers. NAM produces, aggregates and disseminates multimedia content and services for and from the youth and ethnic media sectors. NAM has developed these pathways to achieve our goals:

- Grow a collective presence for the more than 3,000 ethnic news outlets nationwide and professionalize the sector through awards and expos, journalism school partnerships, press briefings, seminars and workshops for professional development and newsletters.
- Bring the voices of otherwise invisible communities into national and regional focus through multi-lingual and cell phone polls.
- Enhance youth development programs that produce peer-to-peer youth media and inter-generational dialogue through ethnic and mainstream media.
- Develop and promote social marketing and corporate messaging campaigns that expand the sector's access to advertising.

newamericamedia.org

Our Network

WE Global Network asked local organizations across the region to assist in promoting the contest to their local networks, collecting the entries, and choosing the winners. These organizations are listed here:

ILLINOIS

Chicago Council on Global Affairs

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs is an independent, non-partisan organization committed to educating the public—and influencing the public discourse—on global issues of the day. The Council provides a forum in Chicago for world leaders, policymakers, and other experts to speak to its members and the public on these issues. thechicagocouncil.org

MICHIGAN

Global Detroit

Global Detroit is an effort to revitalize Metro Detroit's economy by pursuing strategies that strengthen Detroit's connections to the world by making the region more attractive and welcoming to immigrants, internationals, and foreign trade and investment. globaldetroit.com

Global Lansing

Global Lansing is a group of individuals in the greater Lansing region working to educate, engage and empower the community to connect, support and leverage more than

7,000 international students currently attending Michigan State University, as well as the refugees living in the area and the foreign-born entrepreneurs looking to become business owners.

globallansing.com

MINNESOTA

Neighborhood Development Center

Minneapolis-St. Paul

For 21 years, in eight ethnic communities and 25 low-income neighborhoods around the Twin Cities, Neighborhood Development Center has been providing business training, loans, technical assistance and incubators to immigrant and minority entrepreneurs driven to improve their lives.

ndc-mn.org

MISSOURI

St. Louis Mosaic Project

The Mosaic Project is a regional initiative with the goal to transform St. Louis into the fastest growing metropolitan area for immigration by 2020 and promote regional prosperity through immigration and innovation.

stlmosaicproject.org





NEW YORK

International Institute of Buffalo

The International Institute of Buffalo is dedicated to assisting refugees and immigrants overcome language and cultural barriers so that they can become self-sufficient, productive members of the community, as well as promoting global education and international connections in Western New York.

iibuff.org



Welcome Dayton

The Welcome Dayton Plan – written by the community and endorsed by the City Commission – provides a broad policy framework for creating a more welcoming and inclusive environment for immigrants. Welcome Dayton connects projects already underway, while also promoting new initiatives, creating a community-fueled, collaborative agenda to transform Dayton into an immigrant-friendly city.

welcomedayton.org



OHIO

Global Cleveland

The mission of Global Cleveland is to attract and connect newcomers to Greater Cleveland's opportunities, resources and services and to cultivate a welcoming place for all in order to increase the population of the Cleveland Metropolitan Statistical Area.

globalcleveland.org



PENNSYLVANIA

Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians Philadelphia

The Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians connects newly arrived individuals from around the world with the economic opportunities that they need to succeed in our region.

welcomingcenter.org



New American Initiative Columbus

Mayor Michael B. Coleman's New American Initiative was created to give all immigrants and refugees living in Columbus access to city services and programs to help improve their lives. This initiative gives equal opportunity to all refugees and immigrants and allows them to become responsible, productive residents of Columbus.

columbus.gov/Templates/Detail.aspx?id=65002



GlobalPittsburgh

GlobalPittsburgh brings together globally-minded people in the Pittsburgh region through membership activities and hosting programs. It helps universities and English Language programs attract more international students, and coordinates visits for international delegations through the U.S. Department of State.

globalpittsburgh.org

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Global Network

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