

# Eugene-Springfield welcomes Syrian refugee family

BY HENRY HOUSTON  
EDITOR

It was a trip the Ali family waited over two years for, and they had a large group of people from the Eugene-Springfield communities waiting for them. The family had endured a trial of travels, which included a 16-hour bus ride from Gaziantep to Istanbul, Turkey and then a flight to Eugene. The Ali family, who had been waiting in Turkey for the US State Department to approve their refugee status, arrived in Eugene at 10:10 p.m.

“They’ve been waiting for this day for a long time. It’s a brand new world for them,” Catholic Community Services Executive Director Tom Mulhern said. “I think things will bode well for the family.”

Catholic Community Services has worked together with the volunteer-led organization Refugee Resettlement Coalition of Lane County, which has helped ease welcoming the family into the new world of Oregon.

The Ali family was welcomed with a fully furnished house, which they are expected to pay rent for, and a kitchen full of food. Now that the family is in the United States, there are several legal things that



Ali had almost two days of traveling, but he was ready to address his large welcoming party.

must be accomplished. Although, as their caseworker Lupe Thompson said, “the pressure is on” for the family, they’re excited to be a part of the Eugene community.

“There is little that will be free for the family,” Thompson said. “They have to pay rent, they are expected to learn English in about eight months, which his about how much time the travel loan will extend to. They all had learned some English prior to arriving, but their level is very limited. They couldn’t read

the street signs when they got here.”

The State Department had issued the family a travel loan, which the family is expected to repay over time in monthly installments. The loan has been budgeted to pay for airfare, rent, living costs, and English courses.

“The Ali family is looking forward to the ESL classes that they will need to take,” Thompson said. “They are looking into taking ESL classes at Lane Community College.”

will be difficult for the family, but the brother of the family’s husband has had a remarkable process in Eugene. Ali Turki Ali had received refugee status and arrived in Eugene last year. Since arriving, he has achieved a proficient status of English, as well as become employed.

Despite the remarkable progress Ali Turki Ali has demonstrated, the Ali family will have a long road ahead of them, but, in the mean time, they’re happy to be together.

“When I got there on

Thursday afternoon, the kids were excited about a Superman toy,” Thompson said about the Ali children, who are nearly two years old and four years old. “They’re excited and very happy, especially since they’re here with their mom and dad.”

### It takes a village to welcome a family

This isn’t the first time that the community has welcomed refugees, but it is for Catholic Community Services. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishop had asked Catholic Community Services to take on a refugee resettlement program earlier this year. After the implementation of the refugee

program, it led to the creation of the Refugee Resettlement Coalition of Lane County. The two organizations have since collaborated in preparation for the Ali family.

“Over 20 people from the community moved the furnishings into the house in preparation for the family,” Abby Gershenzon, external communications officer with the Refugee Resettlement Coalition of

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Photo by Henry Houston  
Mayor Christine Lundberg welcomes the husband of the Ali family.



Photo by Henry Houston  
Front and center of the Ali family’s welcoming party were the mayors of the two cities. Springfield Mayor Christine Lundberg (right), outgoing Eugene Mayor Kitty Piercy (center), and Mayor-elect Lucy Vinis (not pictured).

Lane County, said. “It’s an amazing moment of our communities coming together. It was done with lots of love and care.”

Although there has been some controversy over refugees in national politics, Mulhern has said that he hasn’t noticed much negativity from the community about bringing in the refugees, though he did acknowledge some did emerge when the refugee resettlement program was

first announced.

“Last May, we got some negative comments on our Facebook page and on a Register Guard article’s comment section, but they’ve been significantly lower than the positive attention that we’ve received in support of the family,” Mulhern said. “We’ve been fortunate that so many people from the community have come out to help the family, many who have had their hearts touched by the

ongoing refugee plight.”

The Ali family, so far, has been processed successfully but there are still two more families that are scheduled to arrive for the organization. Recently, Catholic Community Services received about \$4,000 in donations without fundraising, but Mulhern is hoping to raise \$30,000 for future refugee families.

“We’re organizing special fundraising to help this program. That will reassure people that we are not diverting from our other programs,” Mulhern said. “Some people are worried that we should be helping more poor people here locally. We want to say that we can and should do both, and we think the community agrees.”