

Community, InterFaith Works help refugee family resettle to Caz

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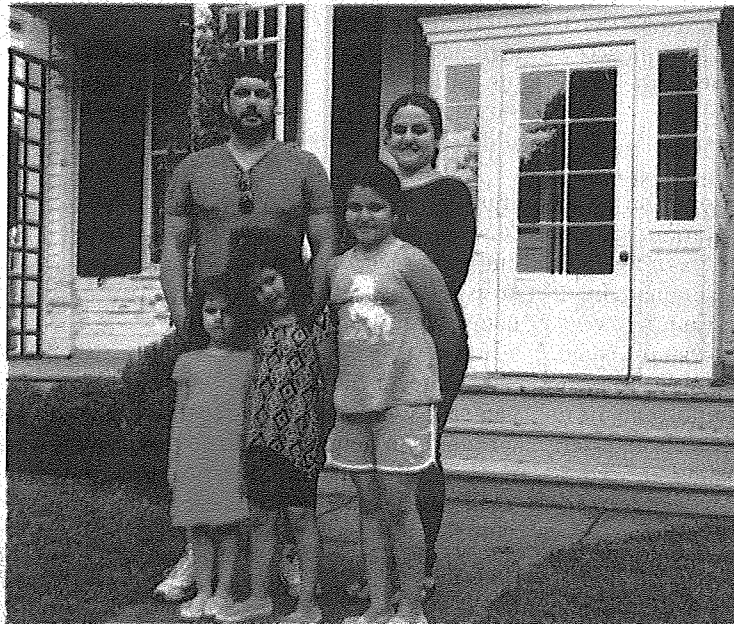
Cazenovia's tranquil, small town pace of life evokes a time from another era. Big selling points are its small shops and historic buildings nestled alongside its namesake picturesque lake. They're not likely to change. But make no mistake, the people that comprise the tapestry of this Madison County community and call it home is growing.

It's a process that's transforming a community fueled by the welcoming spirit of a group of residents of different ages, faiths and business and professional backgrounds that banded together two years ago under "Cazenovia Welcomes Refugees."

It's a name that might seem out of place or even odd in an age of backpedaling federal immigration policies. Yet, on this warm day in late July, a dozen volunteers from the group helped move in a family whose journey to Cazenovia began in 2017 and thousands of miles away in Iraq, where the family's father served as an interpreter for the U.S. Army.

The family was allowed entry to the U.S. on a special immigration visa for refugees who assisted the U.S. military.

"This is going to be the best birthday, ever," Rasan Othman quipped as her mother, Ivan Mo-



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The Othman family in front of the "Old Manse," which the family is renting from the First Presbyterian Church. The Othmans have relocated to Cazenovia from Iraq with the assistance of multiple local organizations and individuals.

ammed Ameen, and father, Rzgar Othman, carried boxes, while younger sisters Rinad and Iman scurried about amid the commotion. Rasan turns nine years old in late-September. When she does, she'll enter school in Cazenovia and spend two months dreaming of the big day in her new home at the "Old Manse," which the family is renting from the First Presbyterian Church located next door. When asked why her ninth birthday was to be so grand, she simply said, "because we're here."

Scenes like the Othman fam-

ily resettlement in Cazenovia have drawn to a trickle around the U.S. because of the federal government's severe limits on legal immigration and refugee entry into the United States. Even though the Administration set the number of refugees allowed entry nationwide at 45,000, the lowest since the 1980s, some experts expect the number to reach only about 20,000 by the end of the fiscal year ending Sept. 30.

This impact is playing out closer to home: InterFaith Works of Central New York, which provided the truck and driver that helped

load the vehicle in Syracuse for the Othman family, resettled just two refugees in July. During the same month, just one year ago, the agency resettled nearly 80 people.

"In these hard times for refugees all around the world, Cazenovia Welcomes Refugees has given hope to not only the Othman family, but to all of us who work with refugees," said Beth Broadway, who is president and CEO of Syracuse-based InterFaith Works and a resident of Cazenovia.

"Seeing this community come together across faith traditions, civic organizations and educational institutions in such a powerful way has renewed our agency's staff. CWR not only settled a family; they are moving the minds and hearts of a whole community towards compassion, service and openness. We look forward to many years of working together with this coalition and share the family's appreciation for all involved," said Broadway, who is also a member of the CWR coalition.

The move to the "Old Manse," erected in 1806 and the former home for the church pastor, took place on a busy morning as First Presbyterian hosted a marriage ceremony and the village's weekly farmers market attracted visitors across the street.

Caroline Cargo and Cindy Sutton are co-facilitators for Cazenovia Welcomes Refugees. According to Cargo, the Othman family's move to the Manse was the result of months of planning, a partner-

ship with InterFaith Works and was not a one-time event for the community-based initiative.

"This is the start of building a community here of new Americans," she said, adding the group had spent a year educating and preparing the Cazenovia community by sponsoring public forums at the local library, the VFW and Cazenovia College. Former refugees spoke at the forums. "What we're about is creating a sense of community," Cargo explained as mattresses, furniture and other household items were carried up a staircase to the second-floor bedrooms.

During a break on moving day, Rzgar Othman expressed his appreciation for Cazenovia Welcomes Refugees and said InterFaith Works' Center for New Americans was instrumental to his family's resettlement, helping complete immigration documentation, find housing and secure employment.

In August, he was hired for a job in Cazenovia, only six minutes away from his new home.

"Everybody should be able to live in the home [country] they're born in," he said, "but what makes you be a refugee is the system and regime that work in those countries. Once you get a better chance for leaving and your kids being safe, [you come to] America. Yes, once they tell you you're welcome to the United States and you can get into that great country, the greatest country in the world, you will be so proud."