

@Sree live-tweets his citizenship ceremony

Reynolds Staff

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By **Amanda Gomez**

Dow Jones News Fund Business Reporting Residency

Social media enthusiast **Sree Sreenivasan** live-Tweeted as he became an American citizen. After more than 20 years, Sreenivasan can call the U.S. home, along with most of his social media accounts.

Professor Sree, as he's commonly known, is Columbia University's chief digital officer. He's also a professor at Columbia Journalism School.

He and his wife, Roopa Unnikrishnan, became citizens May 31 in the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services in New York City as part of a group of 150 people from 43 countries.

These new Americans can fuel the economy in the U.S., especially local economies, according to the Immigration Policy Center.

Sreenivasan, born in Tokyo, moved permanently to the U.S. in 1992. Unnikrishnan arrived in the U.S. on a work visa in 1999 from Chennai, a city in Tamil Nadu, India.

"My contributions are minor," Sreenivasan said, "Mainly being a technology evangelist and skeptic for journalists trying to understand the changing media landscape."

Last year, more than 763,000 people were naturalized nationally. Nearly 84,000 of those new citizens were naturalized in New York, according to Michael Bogen, the acting district director of the USCIS Districts office in New York.

"We try to make every ceremony special," Bogen said. The language used in the Oath of Allegiance is more than 200 years old.

"This is what I call a #lifehighlight – a deeply meaningful and moving moment in my life," said Sreenivasan, who entertained and informed the Dow Jones News Fund Business Reporting Residency program as 21 participants prepare for summer internships at various businesses and news outlets, including Dow Jones Newswires, The Wall Street Journal, the New York Post, Reuters and the Cape Cod Times.

Sreenivasan said "this is a testament to how open and welcoming the U.S. is to immigrants." He said Japan has stricter immigration laws.

EMOTIONAL ROAD TO THE U.S.



Sree Sreenivasan: "Live blogging via smartphone is tough, so I brought along a Chromebook I'm testing."

The decision to become an American citizen was not easy for Unnikrishnan, who has to give up her Indian citizenship. Bogen said that the U.S. allows dual citizenship, but other countries make the decision. "It was an emotional decision," Unnikrishnan said.

Immigrants have to be permanent residents or "green card" holders before applying to become citizens. Immigrants "have to show there is a relationship with an employer or a family member," Bogen said. They also have to show that they are financially stable and have no criminal record to become residents.

For the last three years, about one million immigrants became residents each year, according to the Office of Immigration Statistics from the Department of Homeland Security. In 2011, the total number of "green card" holders was around 13.1 million. Two-thirds of that number were eligible for citizenship. The number of unauthorized immigrants is harder to determine, and there are debates and discrepancies about that number. The Department of Homeland Security estimated 11.5 million unauthorized immigrants live in the United States.

"Immigrants built this country from day one and will continue to do so for years to come," Sreenivasan said.

FOR THE KIDS AND GRANDKIDS

Unnikrishnan said she is becoming a citizen to be part of the democratic process for her children, who are American. It is "a commitment to my kids, that's what it feels like to me," she said. Flexible traveling also influenced her decision. "Part of the process is not just the tickets, it's the visas and the time," she added.

Unnikrishnan moved here as an economist and became a consultant to companies like Citibank and Pfizer, where she works. "When you take an immigrant like me it's a really good bet," she said. "You're adding a richness to the economy."

Unnikrishnan asked Sreenivasan, who posts and tweets on social media daily, why would he tweet during such an important personal moment. His answer: "For the grandkids! I bet a lot of my friends wish they had a record of their parents' and grandparents' memories from the day those folks became citizens."

Amanda Gomez recently graduated from Rutgers University with a bachelors in journalism and media studies and a minor in political science. She is a New Jersey native raised in Puerto Rico. A 2013 Dow Jones News Fund Business Reporting intern, this summer she will work at the Food Institute, where she will be covering the food industry and managing the institute's social media. She can be reached at amandalp@gmail.com.

About the Author

The Reynolds Center, created through generous grants from the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation of Las Vegas and operated by ASU's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, is dedicated to improving the quality of business and economics coverage through training programs for business reporters and editors.

