



CHARLES W. GILCHRIST

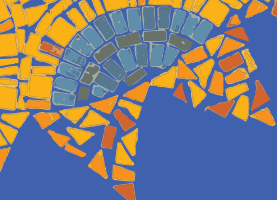
IMMIGRANT RESOURCE CENTER

Welcome. Connect. *Together We Thrive.*



15TH ANNIVERSARY REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY 2001-2016





Did you know that one-third of Montgomery County's one million people were born in other countries?



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter from County Executive.....	1	Gilchrist Center and Partner Programs.....	11
What is the Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Center.....	2	Gaithersburg Center.....	12
Building a Welcoming Community.....	4	East County Center.....	14
The Evolution of a Center to Serve Immigrants.....	5	A Race to the Top: Building Welcoming Communities Across America.....	16
The Original Gilchrist Center.....	6	A Warm & Welcoming Environment.....	18
Charles W. Gilchrist.....	7	Gilchrist Center Partners.....	20
Wheaton Center.....	8	Volunteers: Our Secret Sauce.....	21
Montgomery County Welcoming Framework.....	10		



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October 2016



Dear Friends:

The Charles W. Gilchrist Center is Montgomery County's immigrant resource center. It is the heart and soul of our commitment to make Montgomery County one of the world's most welcoming communities.

Welcoming works. Because of our welcoming spirit, Montgomery County has become a magnet for talented people from across the country and around the world. One-third of our more than one million residents were born in other countries. Having residents who understand every culture and speak nearly every language is our edge in the global marketplace of the 21st century.

All of this did not happen overnight. I am grateful to former County Executive Doug Duncan who had the foresight 15 years ago to establish an immigrant welcoming center. I particularly appreciate that he named the center after former County Executive Charlie Gilchrist. As you will learn from this 15th anniversary publication, Charlie Gilchrist was one of the most important architects of our modern multicultural Montgomery County.

For many of our newest residents, the Gilchrist Center is their first step on the road to prosperity. Whether they have come to study, to be with family, or to flee repression or violence, the Gilchrist Center has for 15 years provided a warm and welcoming environment. For those with limited resources, the Gilchrist Center provides classes in English, computers, and citizenship at virtually no cost. The Center connects our new neighbors to the resources and information they need to thrive.

I am grateful that Montgomery County generously welcomed me and my family four decades ago and that my grandchildren are benefitting from the excellent schools here today.

My staff and I are working hard every day to make sure that everyone who comes here has the same opportunities to meet their full potential my family and I have had.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Ike Leggett".

Ike Leggett, County Executive

WHAT IS THE GILCHRIST IMMIGRANT RESOURCE CENTER?



On September 8, 2001, just days before the tragic events of 9/11, Montgomery County Executive Doug Duncan opened the Charles W. Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity in Wheaton, Maryland to serve Montgomery County's growing immigrant population. The Gilchrist Center is the main gateway to success for thousands of immigrants who come to Montgomery County with limited financial resources. The free classes are the first step to learning English for many who could not otherwise afford to pay for private lessons. Computer classes allow some of our neighbors in need to get promotions at work that allow them to house and feed their families. Classes at the Gilchrist Center start many on the path to citizenship. The Center's information and referral staff connect our new neighbors with the services they need to thrive.

Fifteen years after its founding, the Gilchrist Center has more than proven its worth by becoming a living demonstration of Montgomery County's commitment to welcoming and serving its immigrant population.

Just in fiscal year 2016, the Gilchrist Center has:

- provided volunteer led English, Spanish, and computer classes at no or low cost to 8,219 residents;
- connected 9,245 residents to valuable services by phone or in person;
- served 2,067 residents through partners at Gilchrist Center sites;
- assisted MCPS in serving nearly 800 children and their parents who had fled violence in Central America; and
- hosted its first naturalization ceremony at Gaithersburg Library where 44 people became U.S. citizens and 20 people registered to vote,

This extraordinary work is possible because a small core staff is enhanced by 153 volunteers who donated 7,244 total volunteer hours at an estimated value of \$170,669 last year. With our community partners, outstanding volunteers, and dedicated staff, the Gilchrist Center is building cultural competence and strengthening community every day as we strive to make Montgomery County a thriving multicultural community where every resident feels welcomed and valued.



CHARLES W. GILCHRIST

IMMIGRANT RESOURCE CENTER

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OUR NEW LOOK AND NAME

2016 marks the 15th anniversary of the Charles W. Gilchrist Center. We are changing our name from *Charles W. Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity* to the *Charles W. Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Center* to better reflect what we have become in the past 15 years. We welcome immigrants and connect them to programs and services. Our Center provides a place for immigrants to strengthen their skills and offer their talents so all of us, as Montgomery County residents, can thrive together.



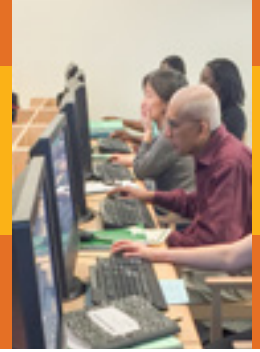
The sun in our new logo represents the warm welcome and sense of community offered at the Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Center. The vibrant colors signify warmth, optimism, and trust. The Center's new name continues to honor Charles W. Gilchrist, Montgomery County's second County Executive, whose welcoming spirit is carried on by the Center's work today. Inspiration for the logo comes from an outdoor mural created by Arts on the Block, a local nonprofit that provides project-based job and life-skills training for underserved high school students through the arts. The mural was made in 2007 for the Center's original location in Wheaton, and is now located at Wheaton Triangle. Our new logo design was crafted by Text Design, Inc.

MISSION: We are Montgomery County's resource center for immigrants. We strengthen the County by connecting our diverse communities with educational, economic, and civic resources so all may thrive here.

WHAT WE DO: The Center is a gateway for County immigrants: they can obtain information and referrals to programs and services offered by government agencies and community organizations, strengthen their life skills through English and basic computer classes, and increase their knowledge to prepare for civic life and/or U.S. citizenship. The Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Center is a community where residents can contribute their talents to help others, and it is a testament to Montgomery County's commitment to building one of the world's most welcoming communities.



BUILDING A WELCOMING COMMUNITY: MORE THAN HALF A CENTURY IN THE MAKING



In 1970, the population of Montgomery County, Maryland was just over 500,000 with 7 percent foreign born. Today, the population is more than one million with one-third born in other countries. How did this happen? How did a suburban bedroom community blossom into one of the most diverse, dynamic, and welcoming communities in all the world?

Montgomery County did not become an international model of a welcoming community overnight or because a County Executive proclaimed that it should be so. Our culture of welcoming and respecting people from all backgrounds has been more than half a century in the making.

There is no oil under Montgomery County. All the gold that was here was mined long ago. People are our greatest natural resource. Our success is based on becoming a magnet for talented people first from across the country and in recent decades from around the world.

Montgomery County grew as people from across the nation flocked to Washington, DC to serve our country during the New Deal, World War II, and the Great Society. Montgomery County became a bedroom suburb of the nation's capital. Many of these people came with a commitment to service, a deep expertise across a wide range of policy issues, and an enormous energy for solving problems. Beginning in the 1940s, some of them turned their attention to building a civic infrastructure in their new hometown. As the population approached 100,000, a reform movement led by the League of Women Voters succeeded at the polls in 1948, making Montgomery the first county in Maryland to adopt a home rule charter. The reform minded culture of public participation began then and serves as the foundation of today's welcoming community.

"Montgomery County's welcoming attitude to immigrants in recent decades has its roots in the county's commitment to civil rights and fair housing in the 1960s."

Bruce Adams, Director, Office of Community Partnerships

The civic reformers who fought to modernize the county's government structure took up the causes of civil rights and fair housing. In 1960, the county created a human rights commission. The County Council enacted one of the strongest fair housing laws in the nation in 1967, one year before Congress enacted the Fair Housing Act of 1968.



Inclusionary zoning, environmental sustainability, and consumer protection were next on the agenda. Immigrant integration and marriage equality are recent examples of Montgomery County's continued national leadership in expanding the rights of all its residents. The work of striving for Dr. King's Beloved Community never ends.



THE EVOLUTION OF A CENTER TO SERVE IMMIGRANTS

On December 10, 1998, the Montgomery County Human Relations Commission held a symposium and public forum — *Walking the Talk... Forging the Future of Multicultural Montgomery County* — to honor the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the General Assembly of the United Nations. County Executive Doug Duncan laid out the challenge facing the County: “We are undergoing demographic change of historic proportions, and this major development requires a fuller understanding of the problems — and promises — of a more complex, a more diverse, population.” In 1999, County Executive Duncan proposed funding for a new Montgomery County Multicultural Community Center that would house a New Americans Welcome Center. The Multicultural Center would serve as a one stop shop for immigrant services, small business opportunities, and cultural events. The County Council approved funding to study the idea, and four town meetings were held to gather ideas and gauge public support.

By 2000, two full-time staff members were assigned to develop what was then being called the Charles W. Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity in honor of the former County Executive who died in 1999. According to County Executive Duncan: “The new center will reflect Mr. Gilchrist’s immense capacity to see and act beyond the boundaries of race, color, and ethnicity.” Ginny Gong, director of Community Use of Public Facilities, explained to *The Washington Post*: “Up until now, there has been no one place for an immigrant to go for help in navigating the system. We had individual departments, but you had to know about them. In a county where so many people come from different places, we’ve got to make it easier for people to access the support they need.”

In September 2001, the Center opened in a Wheaton storefront that had formerly been a nightclub. The focus was on the essential needs of immigrants and newcomers, including classes for English, citizenship, and civics as well as basic legal assistance and an extensive information and referral



September 8, 2001 Opening of Gilchrist Center in Wheaton

system. By 2002, the Center had won an award for innovative programming from the National Association of Counties. By 2003, the Center had compiled a Community Resource database and received a \$250,000 technology grant to support small business classes. In 2004, the Gilchrist Center opened a satellite office in the Upcounty Regional Center. Budget cuts required by the international recession caused the Gilchrist Center to move to the Mid-County Regional Center in 2010. Also, the Center’s administrative home changed from the Recreation Department to the County’s Office of Community Partnerships (OCP). Despite budget cuts, the Center continued to provide its essential services.

At the Center’s tenth anniversary celebration in 2011, Councilmember Nancy Navarro told the *Gazette* the need for the Center is as important as ever: “Imagine if you have recently arrived or if you still have not been able to get your computer skills up to date or improve your English skills. This is really a place where so many questions and so many doubts and fears are alleviated.” With support from County Executive Leggett and the County Council, the Wheaton-based Gilchrist Center has opened satellite sites at the Gaithersburg Library and the East County Regional Center to provide better service to our growing immigrant population at places closer to where they live and work. Since becoming part of the County’s Office of Community Partnerships, the work of the Gilchrist Center has been enhanced through collaboration with OCP’s ethnic and faith based community liaisons and the staff at the Volunteer Center.

THE ORIGINAL GILCHRIST CENTER

Marie-Rose Sirikari was born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. When she was 18, she married Kadi-Kongo Malikidogo. Soon they had three children. Her husband was very active in reform politics. In 1985, he had to leave the country quickly after threats from representatives of the national government. Marie-Rose assumed her husband was dead. She moved back to her village with her children. Two and one-half years later, she was taken to Nairobi, Kenya and reunited with her husband. He took the children to the United States while Marie-Rose sought refugee status. She obtained the refugee status in 1989 and, in December 1990, Marie-Rose boarded a Pan Am jet in Nairobi and flew to Frankfurt, then to JFK Airport in New York, and finally to National Airport in Washington, DC. Her husband and children were there to greet her along with a tall, white guy named Charlie Gilchrist.

Charlie drove the family to his home at 405 West Montgomery Avenue in Rockville where his wife Phoebe had prepared dinner. It snowed the next day. Marie-Rose had never seen snow, and was asking herself "what is this white stuff falling from the sky?" Marie-Rose and her family lived at the Gilchrist home for four months. Marie-Rose didn't speak English. Phoebe didn't speak French. Phoebe used hand signals to teach Marie-Rose how to use the dishwasher and the washing machine. Charlie drove Marie-Rose to the Jewish Community Center for her first ESOL class and took her grocery shopping. At the end of four months, the Gilchrist family helped Marie-Rose and her family get an apartment in Gaithersburg and fully furnished it for them. The Gilchrist family paid the rent for two years. Marie-Rose's husband enrolled in Montgomery College and obtained a degree and certificate in 1995.

Marie-Rose learned English, became a citizen, and in 2002 founded the African Women Council (AWC) to help her fellow immigrants from Africa succeed in America. One day in

2007, Marie-Rose's nonprofit needed a room for a town hall meeting. Someone sent her to a storefront in Wheaton. The director was explaining the rules for using the room when

Marie-Rose looked at a picture on the wall and said "I know this man. He was the one who brought us to America. He took me to school to learn English. He took me shopping. He paid the rent." It was only when Marie-Rose read the biography on the wall that she learned that her benefactor had been the County Executive of Montgomery County. Charlie Gilchrist had not bothered to mention it.

"I know this man. He was the one who brought us to America. He took me to school to learn English. He took me shopping. He paid the rent."

— Marie-Rose Sirikari

Now, Marie-Rose's daughter, Kenge Malikidogo-Fludd, has taken the leadership of AWC to ensure that this important work continues. Marie-Rose's story is the story of Montgomery County. Talented people from all across the world come here, further develop their skills, and give back to their community so others may thrive.

Marie-Rose's story was possible because the Gilchrist family of Rockville, Maryland, opened their home and their hearts to her family. "It was a joy," Marie-Rose remembers. "Being in America. Being with my family. Being in this house. No refugees have been blessed like us."



CHARLES W. GILCHRIST



Charles W. Gilchrist was born in 1936 in Washington, DC and grew up in the nation's capital and Montgomery County. After graduating from Williams College and Harvard Law School and practicing law in Baltimore, he returned to Montgomery County with his wife Phoebe and their three children. While practicing law in Washington, DC, he became involved in local Montgomery County politics and was

elected to represent Rockville and Gaithersburg in the Maryland State Senate from 1975 to 1978. In 1978, he was elected as Montgomery County's second County Executive. Among his many achievements during two terms as Executive were notable initiatives that helped build a foundation of inclusion, respect, and equity for Montgomery's future.

During his service, County Executive Gilchrist recognized the changing face of the largely white, suburban community where he had grown up. He appointed Montgomery County's first African American and Hispanic/Latino community liaisons in 1979 and 1980. To emphasize the importance of these positions, he placed them in the Offices of the County Executive. He worked to establish the County's Committee for Ethnic Affairs in 1985 to advise the County Executive and County Council on matters of public policy relating to the County's growing diverse population. Charlie Gilchrist started Montgomery County's annual ethnic heritage festival. He established the County's Minority Business Procurement Program to increase contracting with the county government by minority, women, and disabled business owners. In addition, he improved communication between the Department of Police and the minority community, initiated training for officers, and developed a plan to attract minorities and women to the police department.

"Charlie Gilchrist established the foundation for the welcoming community Montgomery County has become with all of our residents treated with dignity and respect." – County Executive Ike Leggett

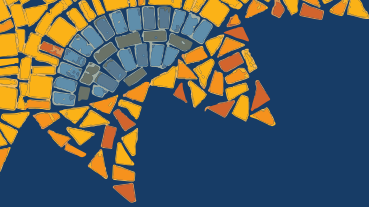
In 1986, he entered Virginia Theological Seminary and was ordained an Episcopal priest in 1990. He served as executive director of the Cathedral Shelter of Chicago from 1991 to 1996. In 1996, he returned to Maryland and joined New Song Urban Ministries in Baltimore to continue his service to the poor. Reverend Gilchrist died of cancer in 1999.

As an elected official and as a clergyman, Charlie Gilchrist worked to open the doors of community life to everyone. He saw the changing demographics of his boyhood home and set Montgomery County on a course of welcoming new faces and different cultures and languages. As his welcoming attitude to immigrants established the foundation for the model multicultural 21st century community Montgomery County has become, many consider Charlie Gilchrist as one of the very most important architects of the modern Montgomery County.

The Gilchrist Center carries out the commitment of its namesake to bring people together across the lines of race, culture, ethnicity, income, religion, and language that too often divide communities.



Bruce Adams, Charlie Gilchrist, and Ike Leggett. 1986



"I love working with immigrants because you see such progress. They take English classes; they try to better themselves in many ways. To me, they are the best of America, the values our foreparents talked of."

– Judith Johnson, Volunteer Job Search Workshop and English Instructor

WHEATON



County Executive Doug Duncan opened the Charles W. Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity in Wheaton on September 8, 2001. Wheaton was a perfect choice for this pilot program designed to serve our growing immigrant population. The Center opened in a funky Elkin Street storefront that had been a nightclub. The utilities weren't always reliable, but the staff and volunteers created a warm and welcoming space. English, citizenship, and other classes became so popular that the Center opened space for additional classes in the Wheaton Library. Community groups used the center for meetings and cultural events. The Latino Economic Development Center's Montgomery County office was initially housed there. In 2010, budget cuts driven by the international recession caused a move to the Mid-County Regional Center. Because of the redevelopment of Wheaton, the Center will open a new office in Wheaton's mall and office complex in 2017. The warm and welcoming tradition will continue.



GABRIELA ZAVALA is an MCPS special educator who was born in Mexico City in 1956. Her husband's job brought them to the United States in 1998. She became a citizen in 2006. A resident of Germantown, Gabriela has taken English classes at the Gaithersburg Library and at the Germantown office of the Gilchrist Center where

she served as a volunteer. She came to Wheaton to take a workforce development class with Judith Johnson. "The Gilchrist Center helped me to be focused on my job and build my skills."

DANIEL FEREDÉ, who was born in Ethiopia in 1978, has 13 years of experience working for international organizations. He left his home country in 2015 for political reasons and came to Silver Spring to live with his sister. He was lonely sitting in the house by himself. His sister learned at the library that the Gilchrist Center needed volunteers. Two days a week, he comes to the Wheaton office to teach computer classes and do data entry. "In Montgomery County, I feel like I belong to this community. You are treated with respect. You are treated with dignity. There are a lot of resources," he explained. "Everything is available. It is up to you. It is up to each person to come and enjoy the resources and improve their lives."





"I listen to the media and CNN. TV shows. There is no problem. But speaking English, I needed a place. This helped me to speak English."

– Milad Mirmomen



MILAD MIRMOMEN was born in Iran in 1984 where he became a medical doctor. "They say the U.S. is the land of opportunity. I wanted to know if this is true," he explained. His mother attended English classes in Wheaton, and he joined the advanced English conversation class. Milad is working to become certified as a doctor here. "The conversation class is the place that helped me to speak English. At home, I speak Farsi with my sister. I listen to the media and CNN. TV shows. There is no problem. But speaking English, I needed a

place. I just study a lot during the day. Sometimes I don't speak to anyone. I just study. This helped me to speak English."

JUDITH JOHNSON came to the Washington area in the 1970s and taught English to Vietnamese immigrants. Trained as a mediator, she had a distinguished career as a nonprofit executive. Judith found the Gilchrist Center on the internet. It sounded flexible and not too rigid so she signed up as a volunteer teacher. She teaches English and has developed a very popular workforce development class. "I have fun. I love, love the students. It is so rewarding to see their progress."

"I teach a class on how to get a job for immigrants. I love it because I see tremendous changes in just eight weeks. People come in. They have a limp handshake. They don't look you in the eye. They don't smile. You have to change all that. You won't get a job in America that way." Judith explains: "I'm tough on people. I want everyone to succeed. I expect people to be on time."

Gabriela says that "Judith helped me a lot. She makes us work hard. We have to prepare. Practice, practice, practice. We practice a lot. Now I feel more comfortable when I go to job interviews." Daniel says Judith's workforce development class was "a life changing opportunity. She taught me how to sell myself in a more advantageous way." Milan describes Judith as "awesome. She is my mentor. She is so passionate about what she is doing. She is open to everything."



Gabriela, Daniel, Milad, and Judith are just four of the people who come to the Gilchrist Center's Wheaton site. There are scores of similar stories of success and growth. Felix Artiga, who came to Montgomery County in 1978 from El Salvador, says "It is exciting to know people from other countries. I never thought I would have friends from Iran, Ethiopia, Colombia, Honduras, and from other countries." Felix's wife Maria was born in Mexico and worked for 29 years at Mexico's Embassy in Washington. She says she loves the foods from different countries. "We will come here until they say we can not come. We will come until they close the doors."

MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND WELCOMING FRAMEWORK OFFICE OF COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

LEADERSHIP & COMMUNICATIONS

Build a larger policy table
Advocate for and with underserved
and emerging communities
Convene and connect key service providers
Help lead the national welcoming movement

EQUITABLE ACCESS

Connect under-served and emerging
communities to the resources
residents need to thrive
Reduce barriers to services and programs

SAFE & CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

Build relationships and foster trust between
County Government and residents
Bridge the barriers that traditionally
divide communities

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY & EDUCATION

Connect residents to the skill
development needed to maximize
their economic potential
Strengthen the County's capacity to serve
our neighbors in need

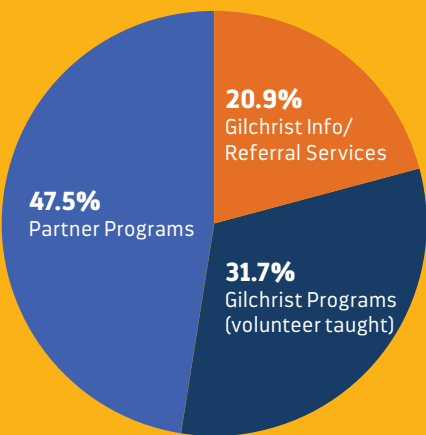
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Encourage all residents to participate
fully in civic life
Promote citizenship and voting

*Modeled after Welcoming America's
National Welcoming Framework.*

GILCHRIST CENTER AND PARTNER PROGRAMS: SERVICES PROVIDED 2007-2016

The Gilchrist Center received a total of 311,693 visits in the period between January 2007 and June 2016. 56.2% came to the Center to learn English and 20.9% were connected to programs and services offered by government agencies and community organizations through Information and Referral Services. Volunteers are a vital part of the Gilchrist Center programming; 31.7% benefited from the Center's volunteer-taught classes. By collaborating with service providers, such as Montgomery College, Baltimore City Community College, Montgomery County Bar Foundation, and Literacy Council of Montgomery County, the Gilchrist Center has expanded resources available to immigrant and newcomer residents over the last decade.



"The teachers were very friendly, I like the way they teach courses. Gilchrist Center helped us afford an education. We are thankful for everything the teachers did for us."

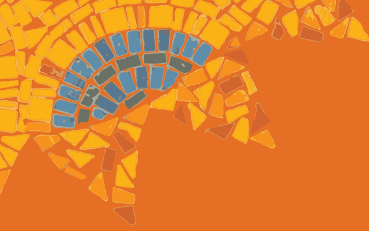
— Student, Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Center 2015



RESIDENTS SERVED THROUGH PROGRAMS/SERVICES AT GILCHRIST CENTER

Base: 311,693 visits from January 2007 – June 30, 2016

110,495	Partner Sponsored English Classes
65,081	Info/Referral Services (walk-in & phone)
64,659	Gilchrist English Classes (volunteer taught)
25,347	Gilchrist & Partner Sponsored Civic Engagement (citizenship, etc.)
19,015	Gilchrist Basic Computer Literacy Classes (volunteer taught)
9,004	Partner Sponsored Legal Clinics
4,376	Gilchrist Spanish Literacy Classes (volunteer taught)
4,017	Gilchrist Spanish Language Classes (volunteer taught)
558	Gilchrist & Partner Sponsored Workforce Development Programs
9,141	Other Programs (Gilchrist & Partner Sponsored)



"I consider the Gilchrist Center to be like my family. What I have learned, I want to share. Information is a powerful tool. If you don't ask, you don't learn. Go for it. I like to share my blessings."

—Cristina Sua-Gatica

GAITHERSBURG



Recognizing the large geographic size of Montgomery County and the rapid growth particularly of the immigrant population, the Gilchrist Center opened a satellite office in the Upcounty Regional Center in 2004. A decade later, the Gilchrist Center's ability to serve Montgomery County's upcounty area increased exponentially with the reopening of the Gaithersburg Library. In January 2014, classes offered by Gilchrist volunteers and the Literacy Council filled quickly. The second floor of the newly renovated library includes classrooms and a suite shared by the Gilchrist Center and Montgomery College's first Community Engagement Center. 2014 marked the start of a new partnership between the Gilchrist Center and Montgomery College. The goal is to share space and coordinate staff to improve each organization's ability to inform and serve County residents.

CRISTINA SUA-GATICA, a travel agent in her native country of Colombia, won a raffle ticket for a trip to the United States in the late 1980s. She came to Washington, DC to visit a cousin. Within a few years, she was married and living in Silver Spring. In the early 2000s, as a resident of Germantown, Cristina went to the library in the Upcounty Regional Center to take an English conversation course led by Mark Sagarin. "I was scared because others knew more English. But I liked the way Mark was talking with the students. He was open. He welcomed everyone. It was free. It was close." In 2014, Cristina took computer classes at the new Gaithersburg Library site and became a volunteer at the Center. Soon she was hired as a part time staff person. "I consider the Gilchrist Center to be like my family. What I have learned, I want to share. Information is a powerful tool. If you don't ask, you don't learn. Go for it. I like to share my blessings."





MARK SAGARIN, a Queens native who was managing mutual funds in New York City in the 1990s, married a Gaithersburg native in 2000 and moved to Montgomery County. By 2005, he learned about an English conversation club at the Gaithersburg Library and signed up as a volunteer teacher. When the renovated library opened

in 2014, Mark connected with the Gilchrist Center and now teaches four English conversation classes each week at the Center. "I like meeting people and hearing their stories. There are incredible stories. I feel so lucky to meet so many genuinely nice people from all over the world. We meet doctors from many countries and help them get comfortable enough in English so they can take the exams and pass. The thing I'm proudest of is all the people who have become citizens throughout our classes. I tell them to bring in the book with the 100 questions. We talk about it here. It helps them get more comfortable."

Mark's conversation classes are alive with positive energy as he engages twenty students from all over the world each week. Four or five of these students have been coming for years. Several are new to the class. Mark welcomes them all, setting them at ease. He holds a small board. Ahmad from Iran proposes the group talk about the word "issue. I have a difficulty with something." Mark writes ISSUE and DIFFICULTY on the board. Tuly of Colombia suggests "there is a problem about something." Mark explains: "There is more than one meaning." Sivone from Bolivia says "there is an obstacle." OBSTACLE is added to the board. Mark gives examples: "It could be a small



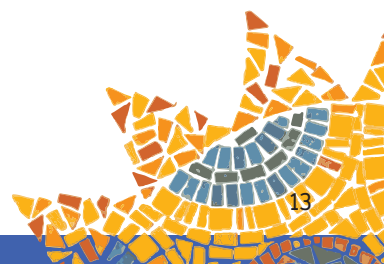
thing like misplacing your keys or a large thing like not being able to extend a visa." Sahura from Nigeria says: "An obstacle is something making it difficult for us to do." Mark wraps it up: "I think Ahmad was talking about an issue as something making it more difficult to do what we want." And on it goes. A new topic emerges from the group. Mark erases the board and pens a new word. For 90 minutes, the conversation doesn't stop. Mark keeps it moving and fun.

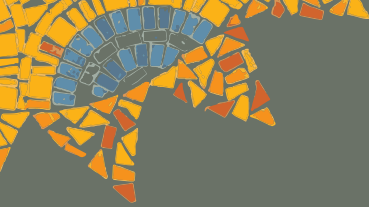


AHMAD REZA MASSAHI

came with his family to Rockville in May 2006 in search of better opportunities for his two teenaged daughters. "In Iran, it is not a good situation for women because they have to follow strict Islamic rules." He came to the area because his sister-in-law was here. Ahmad couldn't speak much English when

he first arrived. His relative told him about a conversation club at the library. He first attended Mark's class in 2007 and has been coming ever since. "Mark is an active teacher and his class has a special place for me. He is very interactive and gives his students a chance to speak, and asks us about our ideas. Before when I first came, I couldn't speak English at all, and I had no chance to practice. But now, I can speak."





"I tell my friends to take English and computer classes as stepping stones to the apartment maintenance classes. Fifteen or 20 friends of mine, I've changed their lives."

— Alimamy Bash Sesay

EAST COUNTY



Much of the eastern part of Montgomery County above the Capital Beltway lacks the robust network of community organizations and activists found in other areas of the County. As a result, services to residents in Montgomery's East County have lagged. To attempt to help remedy this and strengthen ties with the community, the Office of Community Partnerships moved the offices of the County's liaisons to the African American and African communities to the East County Regional Center in 2013. One of the top priority goals was to establish a Gilchrist Center presence in the East County. In 2014, the center began offering volunteer taught classes. In 2015, Montgomery College opened its second Community Engagement Center in the East County Regional Center, enhancing the capacity to provide information and referral and basic English, computer, and workforce classes for East County residents. Due to this enhanced recruitment capacity, the Literacy Council enjoyed large turnouts in 2016.



JUDITH LEWETCHOU, now an international development consultant with Multilateral Development Banks, was born in Cameroon in 1984. She left her small town after high school to pursue university degrees. She learned English to pursue scholarships, lived in Belgium, and was rather indifferent when offered an opportunity

to travel to the United States. When she came to live with her sister in Rockville, she realized she needed to improve her English and went to Montgomery Works for help with her job search. Montgomery Works told her about the Gilchrist Center's job search classes. Her teacher Judith Johnson "helped me understand what I really want to do. I had the basics of writing resumes, but it was difficult for me to fine tune what I really wanted to do. I wanted to do research and evaluation. She told me to focus on what I really enjoy doing." Judith Lewetchou is now a volunteer evaluating the Gilchrist Center's East County computer classes as part of a graduate certificate process at American University. "America has given me everything I have always longed for. It was really a dream come true. I always wanted to give back."





ALIMAMY BASH SESAY was born in Sierra Leone in 1978 and earned his undergraduate degree in information systems there. He met his wife online and came to visit her in 2013. After they were married, he got a green card, and they moved to White Oak Towers. "It was really hard for me to get a job," Bash recalls. "A friend of mine said to

me: 'let's take a walk.'" They went to the East County Regional Center and learned about the Gilchrist Center and Montgomery College. Bash started with English and computer classes. Center staffer Anita Mwalui pointed him to a course in apartment management, and he soon landed a good job. Bash says his instructor Paul Perez from Montgomery College "got me to change my mindset from IT to apartment maintenance."

"I owe a lot to the center and the county as a whole," Bash says eagerly. "The classes were free. I have no student debt! If it weren't for the Gilchrist Center, I'd be paying off my student loans. So I get up at 5 a.m. to get to my 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. job and then once a week I run from my work to my house to the center to teach a computer class." Bash explains: "Most people don't know where to go, don't know who to ask. I tell my friends to take English and computer classes as stepping stones to the apartment maintenance classes. Fifteen or 20 friends of mine, I've changed their lives. They moved from \$12-13/hour to \$18-20/hour jobs."



MONTGOMERY COLLEGE OPENS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CENTERS

"The Office of Community Engagement takes Montgomery College beyond the campus and into the community through community engagement centers, partnerships with nonprofits, community events, and grass roots community outreach," explains Karla Silvestre, Montgomery College's Director of Community Engagement. The office's primary job is to help underserved and under-represented communities connect with Montgomery College.

Montgomery College's first two community engagement centers are co-located with satellite offices of the Gilchrist Center at the Gaithersburg Library and the East County Regional Center. This partnership helps both offices better serve the County's residents with a particular emphasis on building critical language, computer, and other workforce skills.

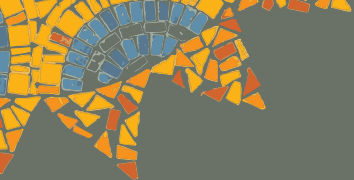
To connect with Montgomery College's Office of Community Engagement, please contact:

karla.silvestre@montgomerycollege.edu



RENEE ROBINSON was born in Washington, DC in 1971. Renee is now working on building her skills in anticipation of her next job. She signed up for Bash's computer class. "Bash is helping me with Power Point and so I'll have more to offer in the job market. I like him. He is patient. There are lots of different students in the

class. Some are older. Some are younger. Some have language barriers. Bash takes his time to help us at our own skill levels." Renee especially appreciates the positive environment at the Gilchrist classes: "It is like a family in there. There are all nationalities. We are all in there to help each other."



A RACE TO THE TOP: BUILDING WELCOMING COMMUNITIES ACROSS AMERICA

Across our nation and around the world, we are hearing voices against the very welcoming philosophy that has made America great. These voices argue that if one group rises, another must fall, pitting ethnic and religious groups against each other.

In his December 4, 2006 inaugural speech on becoming County Executive, Ike Leggett explicitly rejected this zero-sum approach to governing. "I want to make certain that everyone has a seat at our table and a voice in the outcome. The real challenge for us in Montgomery County," he explained, "is how do we include more of us at the table without forcing aside those who are already rightfully there? The simple answer is to increase the size of the table." There would be new faces and voices at the table, but no one would lose their rightful place.

In the Montgomery County tradition, County Executive Leggett recognizes, "Together, we can accomplish great things."



Seventh Annual World of Montgomery Festival, Montgomery College Rockville Campus, October 18, 2015



Naturalization Ceremony, Gaithersburg Library, June 1, 2016

We are not alone. Montgomery County is part of a national network of local governments organized by Welcoming America that is dedicated to the proposition that all of our residents will thrive if we embrace immigrants and foster opportunity for all. Cities and counties across the nation share best practices in a positive competition to be among America's most welcoming and successful communities.

Everyone benefits when newcomers are welcomed and given an opportunity to reach their full potential. Having people here who understand every culture and speak nearly every language in the world is our County's edge in the global marketplace of the 21st century. Embracing the cultures of all who come here doesn't undermine our culture, it enriches it. As County Executive Leggett's gumbo story (see page 17) illustrates, we are all enriched when our diverse ethnic communities celebrate the heritages of their native countries while adapting to and thriving in the culture of their adopted home. The quality of the lives of those who came earlier benefit from the diverse arts, literature, food, and sports brought here by our new neighbors.

WELCOMING AMERICA



BUILDING A NATION OF NEIGHBORS

"Welcoming America inspires people to build a different kind of community — one that embraces immigrants and fosters opportunity for all. We are leading a movement of inclusive communities across the nation becoming more prosperous by making everyone who lives there feel like they belong. We connect a broad network of nonprofits and local governments and support them in developing plans, programs, and policies that transform their communities into vibrant places where people respect each other and everyone's talents are valued and cultivated. Because when communities welcome newcomers, they become better places for everyone."

For more information: www.welcomingamerica.org



National Anthem, Friendship Picnic, Wheaton Regional Park, September 25, 2016



YOUR COUNTY EXECUTIVE IKE LEGGETT ON HOW BUILDING A COMMUNITY IS LIKE CREATING A TASTY GUMBO

"As many of you know, I was raised in the state of Louisiana. Louisiana is the home of one of my favorite dishes, gumbo. Making a tasty gumbo has a lot in common with building the very special community we are building here in Montgomery County. It takes a long time and must be done with great care and commitment."

"The seafood, meat, vegetables, and spices are all mixed up in the same bowl, but a tasty gumbo is much more than a homogeneous melting pot. The way the ingredients are held together by the roux allows each to standout and make each other better."

"This is the essence of how you build a great community, letting the individual strengths and talents of our residents shine while holding them together through respect and dignity."

"So, don't get me wrong, soup is fine. But gumbo is better. Working together and celebrating what we have in common while we respect and honor our differences is what makes Montgomery County so special. Together, we are stronger."



"I can help everybody from every corner of the world. I feel so lucky. We make it easy to get services. We welcome them and make them feel at home. It makes my day when people say 'Thank you, Natalie.'"

— Natalie Chhuan

A WARM & WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT



The first thing you notice when you walk into a Gilchrist Center site is the warm and welcoming environment. As volunteer teacher Judith Johnson says: "I love the Gilchrist Center. Everyone at the front desk is always pleasant. It is against all odds that the staff and volunteers can be so pleasant when so many people are coming in with impossible questions that are so broad." As student Daniel Ferede explains, "You are treated with respect. You are treated with dignity."

One of the reasons that the staff and volunteers at the Gilchrist Center are so helpful, so culturally competent, and so respectful is that most have come to Montgomery County as immigrants and many experienced the Center first as a client. They know exactly what it feels like to be in a community where you are brand new and you don't understand the language. Empathy is so important in this work. Many of the staff and volunteers have been exactly where the people they are serving are now.

Meet **NATALIE CHHUAN.**

Natalie was born in Cambodia in 1949. She was in medical school in the early 1970s when the constant bombing of her country led her to flee to Paris with her new husband. While she studied in France, she sent hundreds of letters home to try to learn the fate of her family members. But, she heard nothing. "I read magazines. And I decided I wanted to come to the United States. My dream came true in 1975." Natalie and her husband moved first to Washington, DC, and then to Arlington, and finally decided Montgomery County was the best place to raise their young children. One day in 1994, twenty years after leaving Cambodia, she received a letter from the Red Cross. Fearing bad news, she was afraid to open it. When she finally did, she learned that twenty-three family members had died, including six sisters and five brothers. Only one sister survived.

Natalie learned about the Gilchrist Center during an IMPACT Silver Spring training session. She got a job as an information and referral specialist at the Center in 2006, and she took Spanish classes to be able to help more people. "I can help everybody from every corner of the world. I feel so lucky. We make it easy to get services. We welcome them and make them feel at home. It makes my day when people say 'Thank you, Natalie.'"





Gilchrist Center staff May 2016

A MESSAGE FROM BRUCE ADAMS, DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

I was born and raised here, and one of the great blessings of my life is that my home county has become a talent magnet for extraordinary people from across the nation and around the world. Since 2007 when County Executive Leggett established the Office of Community Partnerships (OCP), I have had the special privilege of working to strengthen relationships between the County government and our ethnic and faith communities. Our ability to do this work was greatly enhanced when the Gilchrist Center became part of our office in 2010.

We have a small staff with an ambitious agenda. We are working hard every day to do what we can to help all of our residents thrive. Our staff members come from every corner of the globe: Bolivia, Cambodia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Ethiopia, France, Jamaica, Japan, Malawi, Sierra Leone, South Korea, and Venezuela as well as Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, New York, and North Dakota. With our community partners, outstanding volunteers, and dedicated staff, the Office of Community Partnerships and our Gilchrist Center are building cultural competence and strengthening community as we strive to make Montgomery County a thriving multicultural community where every resident feels welcomed and valued.

We work for you. We are here to serve. Please call on us.

MEET THE GILCHRIST CENTER STAFF LEADERSHIP

KAORI HIRAKAWA, a key member of the Gilchrist Center team since 2006, now serves as Center Manager. Previously, Kaori organized educational programs and conferences for a national nonprofit serving the disabled community, engaged university students in international education, and managed cultural and educational programs as a diplomat. She holds B.A. and M.A. degrees in Russian Studies. Kaori was born in Japan and has lived and worked in Russia, United Kingdom, and Japan.

ANNA DENICOLO has more than 25 years of experience in program management and adult learning. Prior to joining the Gilchrist Center in 2012, she worked for ten years at an international development consulting firm. Anna grew up in Michigan, with regular summer visits to her mother's family in Brazil. She earned a B.A. in Communications and Latin American Studies at the University of Michigan and a Master of Public and International Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh.

CINDY KIM joined the Gilchrist Center staff in December 2015, after working with domestic violence victims, immigrants, and other marginalized populations for more than a decade. Cindy has worked at the D.C. Office of the Attorney General (OAG) and the American Bar Association Commission on Domestic and Sexual Violence. Cindy began her career as an immigration attorney. A native of South Korea, Cindy is a graduate of the University of Maryland and Brooklyn Law School.

GILCHRIST CENTER PARTNERS

Montgomery College

www.cms.montgomerycollege.edu/CommunityEngagement

The Gilchrist Center partners with Montgomery College's Community Engagement Center at two of our locations: Gaithersburg Library and the East County Regional Center.

www.cms.montgomerycollege.edu/wdce/aelg/esol.html

Montgomery College's Adult ESOL Program provides basic English language and life skills instruction to County residents whose native language is not English.

Literacy Council of Montgomery County, MD

www.literacycouncilmcmd.org

The Literacy Council offers English as a Second Language classes at three different Gilchrist Center locations.

Baltimore City Community College (BCCC)

www.bccc.edu/citizenship

BCCC provides free weekly classes to prepare for the English language skills and U.S. history, politics, and civics knowledge needed to pass the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) naturalization interview.

Montgomery County Bar Foundation Pro Bono Program

www.barmont.org/?208

The Gilchrist Center partners with the Bar Foundations' Pro Bono Program to provide free weekly legal clinics at two of our locations.

Montgomery Coalition for Adult English Literacy (MCAEL)

www.mcael.org

Gilchrist Center staff collaborate with other Montgomery County nonprofits at MCAEL providers meetings to share best practices, experiences, and knowledge, with the common goal of delivering high quality, effective programs that meet the needs of learners.

CAFE Montgomery MD

www.cafemontgomerymd.org

With the goal of promoting and delivering high quality financial education to county residents of all ages, communities and ethnic groups, the Gilchrist Center has partnered with CAFE Montgomery MD to provide financial wellness information sessions.

THANKS TO THOSE WHO MADE THIS REPORT POSSIBLE

The staff of the Office of Community Partnerships and the Gilchrist Center are grateful to our partners who made this publication possible. Joy West spent endless hours visiting the Gilchrist Center sites to photograph the staff, volunteers, and clients interviewed for this publication. In addition to the photographs presented here, Joy has created a video that wonderfully captures the warm and welcoming environment at the Gilchrist Center. Her buoyant personality inspired everyone working on this project. Chris Renshaw and Meghan Bennett of Text Design worked creatively with the Gilchrist Center staff to design a new logo for the Center and to create this beautiful publication. We thank Dennis Linders of CountyStat who performs miracles with charts and graphs. We are also grateful to the students from Arts on the Block whose 2007 mural is the inspiration for our new logo and whose art is used throughout this publication.



A fund of The Community Foundation in Montgomery County

The Fund for Montgomery was established to raise private contributions to support important community building activities that celebrate Montgomery County's commitment to diversity and community service. Thanks to the following for their generous contributions that allowed us to publish this 15th anniversary report to the community on the Charles W. Gilchrist Center as well as our Quick Start Guide to immigrant services.

Former County Executive Sidney Kramer & Family * Montgomery County Executive Ike Leggett * Aris Mardirossian * Montgomery County Muslim Foundation

Bruce Adams & Peggy Engel * Former Member of Congress Mike Barnes * Gelberg Signs * Barbara Goldberg Goldman & Michael Goldman * Marvin Lang * Steve Silverman * Sanford and Doris Slavin Foundation * Annie Totah Tufail Ahmad * Dr. Anwar Masood * Lawrence N. Rosenblum * Staff of Office of Community Partnerships * Ursula Odiaga Iannone * Shahid Hashmi * Mimi Hassanein * Tariq Husain * Councilmember Sidney Katz * Shafiq Khan * James Lacewell * League of Women Voters * Former Member of Congress & Ambassador Connie Morella * Dr. Aquilur Rahman * Qaiser Shareef * Shepherds of Zion Ministries International Church * Shakeel Siddiqui * Nestor Alvarenga * Bill Bronrott * Holly & Ward Cooper * Mark Feinroth * Stan Gildenhorn * Kasey Kaseman * Daniel Koroma * Laurence Levitan * Julian Norment * Steven VanGrack * Diane Vu



Gilchrist Center volunteer appreciation event December 2015

Join our Volunteer Team!

We are always looking for volunteer instructors and other talented individuals to assist the Center in serving the County's immigrants. Professionals, retirees, students, and community members are welcome. Please visit our website at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/gilchrist for more information on volunteering.

VOLUNTEERS: OUR SECRET SAUCE

The Gilchrist Center's extraordinary work is possible because our small staff was enhanced by 153 volunteers who donated 7,244 volunteer hours in the last year alone. Volunteers teach the core English, computer, and citizenship classes. They help with registration, program evaluation, and information and referral. "The need is so great. Volunteers are our secret sauce. We just could not do what we do without our outstanding volunteers," says Bruce Adams, director of the Office of Community Partnerships which includes the County's Gilchrist Center and Volunteer Center.

Mark Sagarin explains his motivation for volunteering so much of his time teaching English classes in Gaithersburg over the last decade: "The most important thing is that when you are part of a community, you have to give back. They come here for opportunity for themselves but mostly for their children. Many leave everything behind to come here. I feel a responsibility to do whatever I can to help them." Judith Johnson has been a volunteer teacher almost since the beginning of the Center: "It is so rewarding to see their progress."

Meet **KRIS HUNIGAN.**

Kris was born in Nebraska in 1961 and moved to the Washington area with his family when he was in high school. He learned about the Gilchrist Center when he was a department store manager at Westfield Wheaton. Many of his employees needed to improve their English. One day he went to the Center with one of his employees. He was hooked. "It was such a warm, nice bunch of people." Kris volunteered to help with registration. He brought more of his employees for classes. He took a class in workplace Spanish. Kris no longer works in Wheaton, but he continues to help out with registration and do some substitute teaching. "I saw this need as an employer. The Gilchrist Center provides an invaluable service." Kris says his volunteer service at the Gilchrist Center has changed his life: "I have grown as a person so volunteering is something I'll do for the rest of my life."





CHARLES W. GILCHRIST

IMMIGRANT RESOURCE CENTER

Welcome. Connect. **Together We Thrive.**

Main Number: 240.777.4940

GilchristCenter@montgomerycountymd.gov

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/gilchrist

LOCATIONS

Headquarters until 2017

Mid-County Regional Center

2424 Reedie Drive, Suite 220
Wheaton, MD 20902

240.777.4940

Headquarters starting January 2017

11002 Veirs Mill Road, 5th Floor
Wheaton, MD 20902

240.777.4940

Gaithersburg Library Site

18330 Montgomery Village Avenue
2nd Floor
Gaithersburg, MD 20879

240.777.4960

Upcounty Regional Center

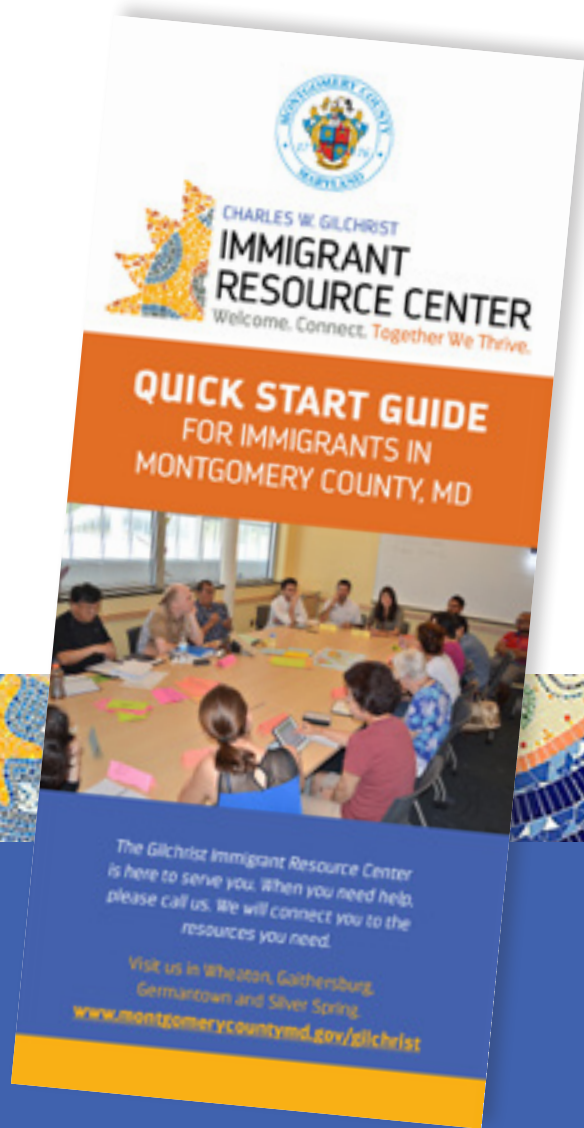
12900 Middlebrook Road
Germantown, MD 20874

240.777.6950

East County Regional Center

3300 Briggs Chaney Road
Silver Spring, MD 20904

240.777.8406



The Gilchrist Center has created a new "Quick Start Guide for Immigrants in Montgomery County, MD." This valuable guide will provide a snapshot of the services and programs that are available to serve immigrants and other residents in our community. Available in English, Spanish, Chinese, French, Korean, Amharic, and Vietnamese, you can obtain a copy at one of our sites or download it at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/gilchrist.