

Congolese refugees begin new life

Florence 'circle of care' members greet 2 brothers

By EMILY CUTTS
@ecutts_HG

NORTHAMPTON — Avoiding the escalators and instead opting for the stairs, the Congolese brothers made one of their first choices in their new American life.

Visibly exhausted from their travels, the pair made their way out of Bradley International Airport in Hartford, Connecticut, Wednesday night surrounded by eager new faces of some of their Northampton circle of care.

The brothers, Oliver, 26, and Guylain, 23, are the second refugee family to move to Northampton. The young men made the journey to Massachusetts from Burundi. Kathryn Buckley-Brawner, executive director of Springfield's Catholic Charities, said at the end of the March that they've lived in a refugee camp in Burundi, east of their homeland, for nearly 15 years.

The brothers declined to give their last names.

Their arrival makes them the second refugee family to arrive in Northampton since the start of the year. The first family, Jasimiyah Hussein and her sons, Yousuf and Ayoob Al-Dulaimi, recently moved into their apartment.

Before the brothers arrived, the circle of care as well as case workers from Catholic Charities had been



Congolese refugee brothers Guylain, 23, left, and Oliver, 26, center, are greeted by their circle of care members including Susan Molano, Susie Zeiger, Gary Felder and Amy Metzger, all of Florence, as they arrive at Bradley International Airport, Wednesday, in Windsor Locks, Conn.

busy planning. Outside the airport, six members of the group gathered to welcome the pair.

"It's so exciting. All of us were saying, I can't believe this is actually happening," said volunteer Gary Felder.

He added that if the circle of care felt this way, he couldn't imagine

what the brothers felt. While those in Northampton have been waiting for months, excited for new community members, the young men had been waiting much longer.

"They've been waiting for this for 14 years because their life depended on it," Felder said.

Buckley-Brawner said the brothers speak French and Kiswahili, but no English.

For months, the volunteer circle of care — who all live in two contiguous co-housing units on Florence Road

SEE REFUGEE A7

SOUTH HADLEY Middle school principal dies

By CAITLIN ASHWORTH
@kate_ashworth

SOUTH HADLEY — Paul Plummer, a longtime area educator and principal at Michael E. Smith Middle School since 2013, died suddenly Tuesday night. He was 49.

Superintendent Nicholas D. Young sent a message to parents and teachers, notifying them of the principal's death and next steps for the administration.

"We're all really crushed," Young said. "His passing is a loss to the building, district and community."

Plummer had a long career in education. According to his LinkedIn account, he started teaching middle school science in the 1990s. He served as assistant principal at Amherst Regional Middle School for two years and then assistant principal at Birchland Park Middle School in East Longmeadow for seven years. In 2013, he became principal of Michael E. Smith Middle School.

SEE PRINCIPAL A5

Refugee brothers arrive in Northampton

FROM A1

— has been taking French classes and learning about Congolese cuisine in preparation for the brothers' arrival.

From the start though, nothing would go according to plan. When the city of Northampton first announced the initiative to resettle 51 refugees, the talk in Donald Trump's presidential campaign against refugees and immigration was just talk. Then, quickly following Trump's inauguration, came two travel bans and court injunctions that temporarily blocked them.

"Emotions have been up and down," said David Entin, co-leader of the volunteer group assigned to the family.

"We're very excited," said Amy Metzger. "We never thought this would happen."

The brothers were expected to arrive at the airport via a van from John F. Kennedy Interna-



GAZETTE STAFF/SARAH CROSBY

Sandra Matthews of Northampton, left, looks on as Congolese refugee brothers Guylain, 23, and Oliver, 26, are shown around their temporary residence in Northampton with volunteer Manirakiza Jamari, right.

tional Airport around 6:50 p.m. As their arrival time came and

ers. Moving up and down the concrete median, holding signs and craning to locate the van the group decided to split up and check the departures area.

In a matter of moments, the van and the brothers were found. A hug was given, signs handed out and the brothers' two small bags were taken off their shoulders as they walked back through their airport, down the stairs and into the vehicles waiting to take them to their temporary housing in Northampton.

Little is known about the brothers but the circle of care knew one thing for certain — the pair love soccer. In addition to stocking the fridge full of food, the volunteers purchased a soccer ball for the brothers to keep.

Looking on as their case worker opened the box, the two took a turn juggling the ball on their feet with smiles across their faces.

'Godfather of Grass' back in US; pot charges loom

BURLINGTON, Vt. (AP) — A legendary outlaw known as the Godfather of Grass who disappeared almost a decade ago while federal agents were closing in on him was deported from Canada on Wednesday and was being held in a Vermont prison pending his return to Kentucky to face marijuana charges.

John Robert "Johnny" Boone was turned over to U.S. authorities by Canadian officials at the Highgate Springs port of entry. He was then taken to federal court in Burlington, where he was ordered held until he can be returned to his home state, Deputy U.S. Marshal John Curtis said.

Boone, 73, was convicted in the 1980s and spent a decade in prison for what

prosecutors called the "largest domestic marijuana syndicate in American history." They said he was the head of the Cornbread Mafia, which had 29 farms in Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Nebraska, Missouri, Kansas and Wisconsin.

Eventually, 70 Kentucky residents were charged with growing 182 tons of marijuana.

During Boone's 1988 federal court sentencing hearing he invoked the hardships of the area where he lived southeast of Louisville.

"With the poverty at home, marijuana is sometimes one of the things that puts bread on the table," Boone said. "We were working with our hands on earth God gave us."