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NEW EXHIBITION, *NEW VIRGINIANS: 1619-2019 & BEYOND*, EXPLORES VIRGINIA'S INCREASING DIVERSITY AND IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCE

The free, yearlong exhibit hosted by Virginia's 2019 Commemoration, American Evolution, Library of Virginia and Virginia Humanities features stories of immigrants and refugees from around the world

Richmond, VA (December 19, 2018) – Last week Virginia's 2019 Commemoration, American Evolution, the Library of Virginia, and Virginia Humanities opened a new exhibition called [*New Virginians: 1619 – 2019 & Beyond*](#). The free, yearlong exhibit located at the Library of Virginia in Richmond offers an in depth look at the immigrant and refugee experience. Visitors are invited to discover new stories about Virginia's ever-changing and increasingly diverse population. The exhibit, produced jointly by the Library of Virginia and Virginia Humanities, shares videotaped conversations with immigrants from more than 30 countries who came to the United States seeking new opportunities or as refugees fleeing war and hardship.

"New Virginians seeks to foster an honest discussion about diversity, the challenges of blended cultures, and the changing demographics of the Commonwealth," said Kathy Spangler, Executive Director of Virginia's 2019 Commemoration, American Evolution. "This in-depth exhibit features a series of interviews with first-generation immigrants and refugees who arrived in Virginia after 1976."

With interviews conducted by David Bearinger and filmed by Pat Jarrett, the exhibit serves as an important reminder of the heterogeneity that strengthens Virginia, and highlights excerpts from personal conversations with the immigrants and refugees from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. These conversations explore the complexity of the immigrant and refugee experience by delving into deeply personal topics that include why people chose to leave their homes; questions about identity, assimilation, language and culture; what it truly means to be an American; and what living in Virginia today means to them. Those who visit the exhibit will hear from refugees and immigrants that come from a wide variety of backgrounds and work across different fields and industries. Virginia's Secretary of Education, Atif Qarni, is one of the exhibit's featured interviewees.

To complement the videos, featured objects that have special meaning to the interviewees are on display at the exhibit, including:

- A graduation stole given to Isabel Castillo by her grandmother to celebrate Castillo's receipt of an honorary doctorate from the University of San Francisco;
- A copy of *Wedding Song*, a memoir by Farideh Goldin about her journey from Iran to the United States;

- A mask crafted by Ganna Natsag for a *tsam* (masked dance) ceremony practiced in his native Mongolia;
- A stringed instrument called a *charango* from Bolivia;
- A Qur'an from Aliaa Khidr that represents the free practice of religion guaranteed by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

A traveling version of the exhibition will be offered to communities and public libraries in Virginia. Complete interviews will be available early in 2019 through the [Library of Virginia's YouTube channel](#) and [website](#). Images of select "New Virginians" interviewed are available on the [Library of Virginia's Flickr page](#).

New Virginians: 1619 – 2019 & Beyond is a Legacy Project of the 2019 Commemoration, American Evolution. The 2019 Commemoration has partnered with notable Virginia institutions and national partners to inspire local, national and international engagement in the themes of democracy, diversity and opportunity, and reinforce Virginia's leadership in education, tourism, and economic development. American Evolution™ is commemorating formative events that occurred in 1619 Virginia. These pivotal events include the First Representative Legislative Assembly in the New World, the arrival of the first recorded Africans in English North America, the recruitment of English women in significant numbers to the Virginia colony, the first official English Thanksgiving in North America and the entrepreneurial and innovative spirit of the Virginia colony. Over the next year, the 2019 Commemoration, American Evolution will host more than 20 events, programs and educational initiatives commemorating the 400th anniversary of these formative 1619 Virginia events. A full schedule of American Evolution programming, upcoming events, and educational initiatives can be found at: <https://www.americanevolution2019.com/events/>

About the 2019 Commemoration

The 2019 Commemoration, American Evolution™, highlights events that occurred in Virginia in 1619 that continue to influence America today. Featured programs, events and legacy projects position Virginia as a leader in education, tourism and economic development. American Evolution™ commemorates the ongoing journey toward the key ideals of democracy, diversity and opportunity. Dominion Resources is an American Evolution Founding Partner and Altria Group and TowneBank are Virginia Colony Partners.

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