



442 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5117
Tel (781) 322-9777 TTY (800) 439-2370
www.ilctr.org

Diane Portnoy, Founder and CEO

2019 Immigrant Entrepreneur Award Winners Announced

Immigrants honored for their economic, social and scientific contributions in Massachusetts

MALDEN, Mass, October 30, 2019 /In honor of the tremendous contributions of immigrant entrepreneurs to the commonwealth, 252 business and community leaders gathered for the eighth annual [Barry M. Portnoy Immigrant Entrepreneur Awards Benefit](#). The Immigrant Learning Center, Inc., held the event at the Royal Sonesta Boston on Tuesday, October 29, 2019.

Jay Ash, former secretary of housing and economic development and the current CEO of Massachusetts Competitive Partnership, returned as a featured speaker and remarked that this is his favorite event of the year. He noted that more than 20 percent of businesses and two-thirds of new businesses started in Massachusetts have an immigrant founder. On behalf of himself, Governor Baker and the CEO's of Massachusetts Competitive Partnership, Ash told the nominees, "not only how proud we are that you are here, but also how grateful we are that you continue to do what you do each and every day to make life better for your families, your employees, your community, state and country."

This awards program is the only one to celebrate immigrant entrepreneurs in New England. It highlights the crucial contributions immigrants make to society, as reflected by The ILC Founder and CEO Diane Portnoy's remark to the immigrant entrepreneurs present, "Thank you not only for joining us this evening, but for coming to this country and making us stronger."

This year's nominees were 38 entrepreneurs from 26 countries. More than 2,000 people in 39 communities, from Hyannis to Springfield, have jobs because of them. Winners were selected from four categories that represent four sectors where immigrants have an outsized impact: Neighborhood, Life Science, High-Tech and Growth. Although they created four very different businesses in different industries, they all shared a desire to have a positive impact on their community, employees, industry and the country.

Larry Kim is an immigrant from Canada and the recipient of the 2019 Award for High-Tech Business. He founded WordStream, Inc. in 2008 and MobileMonkey, Inc. in 2017 in Boston. He has given jobs to nearly 1,000 people over the past decade and, through his technology, has helped thousands of other businesses to grow. Kim described this award as, "This is the most meaningful honor of my professional career." In accepting the award, he said that he sees entrepreneurship as a virtuous calling because, "As immigrant entrepreneurs, I believe our most valuable contribution to society is in leveraging our unique pioneering spirit to create tens, hundreds or even thousands of meaningful job opportunities."

Yessy Feliz is an immigrant from the Dominican Republic and the recipient of the 2019 Award for Neighborhood Business. In 2012, she founded doggy daycare, boarding and pet food retailer Tails, Inc., the first of its kind in her Jamaica Plain neighborhood. Feliz sees her business as not only a way to serve her customers but also to provide careers and economic development to the community. She thanked her employees, some of whom have been with her from the start. She said she prefers to hire people “that society thinks are not good enough, and I give them second chances.” She says her goal is to “give up all my knowledge because at one point in my life I was given that, so the only thing I can do is give back.” In fact, she expects some of her employees will be ready to start their own businesses soon, and she says “I will be supporting them 100 percent.”

Bernat Olle is an immigrant from Spain and the recipient of the 2019 Award for Life Science Business. He founded Vedanta Biosciences, and he was a member of the founding teams of several other life science companies in the PureTech portfolio. Vedanta, which employs 81 people, has developed clinical candidates for the treatment of infectious disease, inflammatory bowel disease, food allergy and cancer using the human microbiome. In accepting the award, he said that despite all of the anti-immigrant activity in recent years, “America is an extremely welcoming country to immigrants. We keep coming here, generation after generation, because no other country on Earth comes close to it when it comes to freedom and opportunity.”

Joseph Ngaruiya is an immigrant from Kenya and the recipient of the 2019 Award for Business Growth. He founded A Better Life Homecare in Springfield to ensure that low-income elderly people could receive compassionate care at home with their families. A Better Life serves approximately 300 clients in Massachusetts and Connecticut, has grown employment by 233 percent in the last three years, and earns approximately \$5.5 million annually. In accepting the award, Ngaruiya thanked his parents who he said worked 90 hours a week when he was a newly-arrived child in America, “just to put food on the table.” He also thanked his employees, to whom he said, “There is really no me without you.” Lastly, he thanked all the communities they serve for allowing them to provide services in their homes.

Information about all the nominees for The Barry M. Portnoy Immigrant Entrepreneur Awards can be found on [The ILC's website](#).

About The Immigrant Learning Center, Inc.

The Immigrant Learning Center, Inc. (ILC) of Malden, MA, is a not-for-profit organization that gives immigrants a voice in three ways. The English Language Program provides free, year-round English classes to immigrant and refugee adults in Greater Boston to help them become successful workers, parents and community members. The Public Education Institute informs Americans about the economic and social contributions of immigrants in our society, and the Institute for Immigration Research, a joint venture with George Mason University, conducts research on the economic contributions of immigrants.

For more information, visit the website <http://www.ilctr.org>. The ILC can also be found on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr.

Media Contact:

Karen E. Glover

The ILC Director of Communications

Phone: 781-322-9777
kglover@ilctr.org

###

Key Facts About Immigrant Entrepreneurs:

- Immigrants are [twice as likely to start companies](#) as the native-born, and first-generation immigrants founded nearly 30 percent of all new U.S. businesses in 2016, which is up from 13.3 percent in 1996.
- [Refugees are even more entrepreneurial](#). 13 percent of refugees, 11.5 percent of non-refugee immigrants and nine percent of U.S.-born population were business owners in 2015.
- Immigrants have founded [55 percent of the country's startup companies worth \\$1 billion or more](#), and immigrants and the children of immigrants founded or co-founded [43 percent of the 2017 Fortune 500](#), including Massachusetts-headquartered companies Biogen, Thermo Fischer Scientific and The TJX Companies, Inc.
- In 2013, 28 percent of ["Main Street" business owners](#) were immigrant entrepreneurs.