



NEWS RELEASE

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Gateway Welcome Project Kicks Off Immigrant Welcome Week With A Big Assist from the St. Louis Construction Industry

*More than \$200K in Services/ Funds Donated to Build a New Soccer Field for Immigrant School
Students with future Activities planned to Welcome Immigrant Children*

ST. LOUIS – They come to America to build a future and in some cases rebuild their shattered lives. Many of the nearly 400 immigrant and refugee children, from K-10th grade, who attend St. Louis Public Schools’ Nahed Chapman New American Academy (NCNAA) are getting their first taste of education – and of American life.

Soon, NCNAA students will receive a special “Welcome to St. Louis” message from an unexpected quarter – the people and companies of the St. Louis construction industry. That welcoming message is being delivered in a universal language that virtually all of the children, who come from 27 countries and “speak” and love: Soccer.

On Sept. 13 NCNAA, which is located at 1530 S. Grand (near SLU Hospital) will unveil a new artificial surface soccer field with a custom designed shelter area and landscaping, thanks to cash and in-kind donations totaling more than \$200,000 from the construction industry, the soccer community, and other supporters. The event will be the centerpiece of St. Louis’ celebration of “[Welcoming Week](#),” a national event which celebrates the contributions of immigrants to America’s history and to its future. The St. Louis celebration is being spearheaded by the [St. Louis Mosaic Project](#).

NCNAA Principal Donnie L. Harris told of a student who remarked to her that it must have been expensive to create the field. Harris told the student that all of the time and materials had been donated for the students.

“They replied to me that no one would do this in their (home) country,” Harris said.

In May of 2015, Peter Tao, principal of the architecture firm Tao + Lee Associates, Inc., approached [Construction Forum St. Louis](#) (CFSTL) to engage its industry connections to help build a soccer field for the NCNAA students. NCNAA teachers and administrators told Tao, who is a member of the MOSAIC Project steering committee, that the school's students – many of whom suffered from PTSD and other emotional scars from their environment prior to arriving in the U.S. – benefited tremendously from outdoor play. But the NCNAA asphalt playground was crumbling and dangerous.

Addressing the playing surface issue was the immediate concern. But the discussion quickly evolved into a bigger vision. Together Tao, the leaders of CFSTL, and like-minded organizations and individuals formed the [Gateway Welcome Project](#) (GWP) a not-for-profit corporation. Tao, the son of successful immigrant entrepreneurs, was chosen as the first president of the organization.

GWP's bylaws state that it will work with immigrant support organizations such as the International Institute and St. Louis Mosaic Project to “assist and encourage existing St. Louis Metropolitan Area residents and companies to be inviting and hospitable towards immigrant and refugees, and their families;” and “to provide the children of immigrant and refugees opportunities to assimilate into the culture and life of the St. Louis Metropolitan area by creating a positive, rewarding and enjoyable environment in which they can grow, learn and become accustomed to circumstances, customs and cultures that may be different from what they were previously accustomed to or acquainted with.”

The St. Louis Public Schools' ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) program welcomes refugee and immigrant students. Many of those students begin their US educational experience at NCNAA, one of the ESOL centers in the district and the only K-10 newcomer school in the St. Louis area.

“NCNAA and its ESOL program are some of the initial institutions that welcome refugee and immigrant kids once they have been settled,” Peter Tao said. “Gateway Welcome Project, collaborated on what and how to help support and welcome these students into our community.”

“The hope is that these kids will learn from this experience what it means to be in America, will one day be engaged with this community, and will becoming ambassadors to others and perhaps future leaders. We also hope that through this project our residents of our

region will have a better understanding of the global challenges and issues and the value of a diverse community.”

Joe Blanner, president of CFSTL and partner in the law firm of McCarthy Leonard & Kaemmerer noted that, “Not one St. Louis construction industry company or individual who we approached turned us down. From its founding, St. Louis was built by immigrants. We benefit from the legacy of the immigrants – Italians, Irish, Germans – who brought their skilled trades to this country and founded construction companies, many of which continue to this day. Today’s new generation of immigrants is critical both to the future of our construction industry and to the future of the St. Louis region. It’s imperative that we welcome and encourage them.”

Blanner noted that it is the objective of GWP to embrace other disciplines, such as community health, STEM, and sustainability, and to take on projects in other immigrant-focused schools in St. Louis.

Instrumental to the success of the project was the participation of PHL, Inc., a not-for-profit organization which has to date completed eight playing fields for the St. Louis Public Schools, Thom Kuhn, member of the PHL board of directors and CEO of Millstone Weber construction services served as project manager at NCNAA.

Participating individuals and organizations, who operate under the umbrella of the recently-formed Not-For-Profit [Gateway Welcome Project](#) include: ASP Associates; Bergfeld Recreation; Bistate Utilities; Bussen Quarries; Cole Engineering; Construction Forum STL; Construction Forum Education Foundation; DG2 Design; D&S Fence; Eastern Missouri Laborers; Engraphix ; Hansen’s Tree Service; Home Depot; Klance Unlimited; McCarthy Leonard & Kaemmerer; Metropolitan Sewer District; Midwest Block and Stone; Midwest Construction Products and Services; Pace Construction; PHL Inc.; Sam Fox School of Visual Art and Design, Washington University in St. Louis; St. Louis Pick Up Soccer; St. Louis Scott Gallagher Soccer Club; Tao + Lee Architects; Thomas Industrial Coatings; and SITE Improvement Association; and Xgrass.

GWP President Peter Tao said, “While this project has been done because our team wants to help, and frankly it adds much enrichment to our own lives, I do believe it is a good opportunity to be a teachable moment for these students.

‘The message? This is a great country, where opportunities are available and that there is a community and people out there, somewhere, to help you. And – that as you grow and

advance in your life – you should recognize that one day others may need help and you may want to give back, in whatever way you can.”