

# News Release

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## **County Executive observes Welcoming Week, celebrates international newcomers**

**SUMMIT COUNTY, OHIO**—Summit County Executive Shapiro and County Council are celebrating Welcoming Week and highlighting the role of immigrants, refugees, and new citizens in building a vibrant and strong Summit County. Launched by Welcoming America in 2012, Welcoming Week is an annual campaign bridging language and culture to provide a sense of belonging to new residents and citizens across the country. Welcoming Week runs September 13-22, 2024. Summit County is a member of Welcoming America.

This year's theme is "We're All In," which seeks to bring individuals and groups together to celebrate their strengths and differences and highlight the importance of being "All In" on creating communities that value and respect all perspectives, backgrounds, experiences, and cultures.

"Everyone has a story about what brought themselves or their family to Summit County," said Executive Shapiro. "By sharing our own stories, lifting up the voices of recent newcomers whether they are refugees, immigrants, or international students, and emphasizing our common history, we can showcase how similar we truly are and build a connected, supportive community."

In Summit County, the International Institute of Akron (IIA) has resettled approximately 500 refugees from countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar (Burma), Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, and Syria during this fiscal year. As refugees and immigrants move to Summit County, it is incumbent upon our leaders and residents to be welcoming, inclusive, and mindful of the barriers new residents may face when seeking an education, a job, healthcare, and more.

As crises unfold in countries across the globe, the need for welcoming, supportive communities grows. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimate that there were 43.6 million refugees in 2023, a staggering increase of 14 million people compared to refugee settlement statistics from just 5 years ago. Additionally, the UNHCR estimates that there are 117.3 million people forcibly displaced from their homes, more than ever before.

While these numbers are overwhelming, it is important to remember that they represent individual lives and experiences. Each new resident and family seeking a home in Summit County has talents, skills, and ambitions to offer. By fostering a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere, the County can continue to grow and thrive as a home for people of all backgrounds.

To learn about refugee resettlement in Summit County, check out IIA's website at [www.iiakron.org](http://www.iiakron.org).

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