



July 14, 2006

Press Release

USCIS SERVICE CENTERS CELEBRATE 25 YEARS

(WASHINGTON) - What began 25 years ago with a handful of employees in the basement of a post office in northern Vermont, is now a major part of how U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) efficiently and securely provides immigration benefits to millions of customers every year. Created to carry out work that does not require face-to-face interaction with the public, the USCIS Service Centers located in Vermont, Texas, California and Nebraska, now handle more than 70 percent of the applications received every year.

The idea of the service centers was first conceived in the late 1970s by two legacy U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) managers during a hunting trip in northeastern Vermont. The concept was to relieve overburdened district offices by transferring work that did not require applicant interviews to other locations. This allowed the district offices to concentrate on applicants for immigration benefits such as citizenship and legal permanent residency that require face-to-face interviews.

During the next 25 years the concept of moving non-interview work away from the district offices to the service centers would grow and expand. New policies and innovative procedures allowed the service centers to handle more types of immigration applications and petitions with increased efficiency and security.

Today, the four Service Centers play a critical role in USCIS backlog elimination and fraud detection efforts. Experienced USCIS Immigration Officers at the Service Centers are often the first to examine an application or petition for immigration benefits, serving on the front line of USCIS efforts to secure our homeland.

These officers are joined by more than 5,000 government and contract staff who work around the clock to receive, process, and adjudicate millions of applications and petitions for immigration benefits from all 50 states and countries around the world. During fiscal year 2005, USCIS Service Centers handled 5.7 million of the more than 7 million applications received by USCIS and securely processed nearly \$1.3 billion in fees.

-USCIS-

On March 1, 2003, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services became one of three legacy INS components to join the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. USCIS is charged with fundamentally transforming and improving the delivery of immigration and citizenship services, while enhancing the integrity of our nation's security.

