

Taking Initiative When Opportunity Knocks

Cameroon Diversity Visa Lottery Winner Comes to America and Begins Navy Career

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Photo by Mass Communications Specialist 2nd Class Bradley Dawson

The Diversity Visa Lottery program can be considered the golden ticket for citizens of nations with low rates of immigration to the United States to gain permanent residence in this country. The congressionally mandated program is a multiple-step process that grants permanent residence visas to applicants who have met all education and residency requirements set by the Department of State. The probability of winning is slim, but the reward gained is considered an opportunity many would have never had without it. Personnel Specialist Petty Officer 1st Class Nathaniel Ndikum of NAS Fort Worth JRB was one of the fortunate few given that reward.

Ndikum was born in Cameroon, a country on the east coast of Africa bordering Nigeria. The National Association of Foreign-Born, an organization whose mission is to serve foreign-born individuals entering or living in the United States and provides free information on visas and immigration, states that a significant percentage of countries eligible and nearly half of the applicants selected for the lottery are native to the African continent.

Millions of permanent resident hopefuls from all over the world apply to the Diversity Visa Lottery. A computer randomly generates a list of names from the entire applicant pool, and these people are then investigated to confirm they meet eligibility requirements. The DV lottery program requires all applicants to submit verifiable proof of citizenship in their current nation and proof they have completed an education equivalent to that of a high school diploma.

“You control your own destiny in the Navy. It is full of opportunities, and you just need to take the initiative.”

“I had already received my bachelor’s degree in literature when I applied,” stated Ndikum.

In January of 1999 Ndikum had a friend, also from Cameroon, who studied at a university in the United States. Before leaving for school, his friend offered to put Ndikum’s application in the mail upon his arrival in the States to save Ndikum postage money.

“I only applied one time. I filled it out and then forgot about it.”

To Ndikum, the probability of him winning the lottery was almost laughable. Therefore, six months later when Ndikum received a call that the Department of State was attempting to contact him, he was surprised.

“I had no idea what it was about and then it hit me, could it be about the DV stuff,” Ndikum thought to himself. “I got the envelope, ripped it open, and I was in shock. The chances are one in a million. Nobody wins.”

Chances are indeed slim for citizens of Cameroon. Immigrationroad.com, an e-information center for immigrants living, working and studying in the United States, published that an applicant native to Cameroon only has a 1.65 percent chance of being granted a visa.

Ndikum expressed that being selected was great news to him and his family, but they knew that selection was no guarantee of permanent residence.

“Being selected doesn’t necessarily grant you the visa. I had to go through many medical exams and interviews,” Ndikum explained.



Personnel Specialist Petty Officer 1st Class Nathaniel Ndikum gives Public Works Construction Engineer Chief Petty Officer (SCW) Willie Collins details on the Commander Navy Installations Command Suite Portal to update conditions on the installations while serving as the command duty officer. Ndikum is a native of Cameroon and won the Diversity Visa Lottery to live in America and soon after serve in the U.S. Navy.

According to the DV Lottery application website, there are nearly 100,000 selectees chosen initially. After the applicant information has been verified, rejecting those who no longer qualify, they then undergo rigorous investigations until only 50,000 selectees remain.

Notification of passing all investigations and a winner is being granted a permanent residence visa marks the beginning of a series of arrangements that must be made before the lottery win can arrive in the United States.

“You have one year from being granted the visa to move,” said Ndikum.

The first obstacle many face during the move is finding the funds to make the trip from a selectee’s native country.

“Family and friends made contributions to help me, they understood this was a once in a lifetime opportunity.”

Once you know you have the ability to secure travel arrangements, lottery winners have to name a current resident to sponsor them that can pass the government’s standards of income.

“You have to find someone already in the States willing to accept you and lodge you for a while once you arrive. They have to submit their tax returns

and be approved for an add on to their household,” said Ndikum.

Ndikum currently works as a Personnel Specialist and expressed that he has thoroughly enjoyed his time in the Navy.

“I remember watching the ships and sailors come in to port when I was in Cameroon,” said Ndikum, “and I always liked them.”

After arriving in Minnesota in October of 1999, Ndikum started researching Navy recruiting information online. Through his efforts he discovered that a permanent residence visa made him eligible for service.

“I called the recruiter right away,” said Ndikum.

Ndikum stated that he loves the Navy and has never regretted his decision to join.

“I have seen places around the world that I could only read about in history books before, like the Black Sea and Panama Canal, and I am getting paid to see them.”

Although luck influenced Ndikum’s life 12 years ago and made his career in the Navy possible, he believes a successful career is based on hard work. If he could tell sailors one thing, states Ndikum, “You control your own destiny in the Navy. It is full of opportunities, and you just need to take the initiative.”