

## NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 1, 2022

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### WNCHA History Hour: Refugees and Resettlement in WNC

ASHEVILLE, North Carolina - Join the Western North Carolina Historical Association (WNCHA) **Tuesday, March 8 from 6:00pm-7:30pm** for this special event focusing on past and present refugee and immigrant resettlement in western North Carolina. This event airs live via Zoom and will be recorded.

As American forces withdrew from Afghanistan last summer, preparations were already underway to resettle many Afghans in the United States. In this ongoing process, several individuals and families have been relocated to western North Carolina. This is not the first time, however, that displaced groups have found a home in the mountains. From the Waldensians who founded the Town of Valdese in the 1890s, to Lao, Hmong, Ukrainians, and other groups resettling after the Vietnam War and other global developments, many displaced individuals seeking better lives have established homes and communities in WNC. This event aims to tell their stories in light of the present moment as we witness another humanitarian crisis and war on Ukraine.

Speakers include **Rev. Kevin Frederick** on the Waldensian settlement in Valdese, NC, **Katy Clune** on first- and second-generation Lao refugees and settlers in Morganton, NC, as well as **Noele Aaybe** and **Jesse Boeckermann** with the Catholic Charities organization, currently working to resettle Afghan refugees.

#### About the Speakers:

**Reverend Dr Kevin Frederick** is a retired Presbyterian Pastor who served the Waldensian Presbyterian Church in Valdese, NC, for 13 years from 2007 to 2021. He had served churches in Tennessee, Mississippi, and North Carolina before coming to Valdese. As an educator and a historian, he researched extensively the 850-year history of the Waldensians and spent three months on a sabbatical in 2015 researching that history in Italy, Germany, France, and Switzerland. In 2018, he authored the book, *With Their Backs Against the Mountains: 850 years of the Waldensian Witness*. He has spoken numerous times on Waldensian history and continues an affiliation with the Waldensian Museum in Valdese.

**Katy Clune** is the Virginia state folklorist and director of the Virginia Folklife Program at Virginia Humanities. Previously, she worked as director of communications for Duke University's arts initiative and as communications manager for The Textile Museum in Washington, DC. She has a MA in folklore from UNC Chapel Hill and a BA in art history from UC Berkeley. As the child of a foreign service officer, Clune grew up mostly overseas, but now calls Charlottesville, VA, home. Clune notes that Morgantown, NC, is a city of about 16,500 tucked in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains—and since the end of the Vietnam War, a growing number of first- and second-generation refugees and immigrants from Laos call it home. Clune will share an overview of her MA thesis research completed in 2015 that illustrates, through the experience of the Phapphayboun family, how traditional foodways help strengthen and maintain Laotian identity in this new context thousands of miles away from Laos.

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**Noele Aabye** serves as the Refugee Resettlement Case Coordinator for Catholic Charities Diocese of Charlotte in its Western Region Office in Asheville. She started on August 30, 2021 and oversees the Afghan evacuee situation for Catholic Charities in Buncombe County. She served at Pisgah Legal Services for six years prior to coming to Catholic Charities.

**Jesse Boeckermann** is the Western Region Director of Catholic Charities, which helps people in need in the 12 westernmost counties of North Carolina from Buncombe, Henderson, Madison, and Yancey Counties and all counties west to the borders. Jesse started at Catholic Charities in January of 2021.

The Western Region Office of Catholic Charities has been doing refugee resettlement work for over five years in the Asheville area, serving refugees from eastern Europe (Ukraine, Russia, Moldova) and central America, including Guatemala. As the refugee resettlement placement program in Asheville, Catholic Charities was tasked with resettling 40 Afghan evacuees starting in October after the Taliban took over Afghanistan this summer. Our refugee resettlement staff of three people and overall Western Region Office staff of eight employees and two interns have work tirelessly over the last five months to serve the Afghan evacuees with housing, food, clothing, transportation, and a variety of other services to help them transition to life in the United States and the Asheville area.

**Tickets:** By donation. Please consider a donation of \$5 for WNCHA members/\$10 for general admission. Several no-cost, community funded-tickets are available as well. Donations will be split with Catholic Charities to support their work with Afghan refugees. For other ways to support this mission, see [https://ccdoc.org/images/ForStaffOnly/Volunteers/Supporting\\_Afghan\\_Evacuees\\_-\\_Current\\_Update.pdf](https://ccdoc.org/images/ForStaffOnly/Volunteers/Supporting_Afghan_Evacuees_-_Current_Update.pdf)

**Register:** <https://www.wnchistory.org/>

(Images: Waldensians in Valdese for the first Christmas in 1893, from Maxine McCall and Kays Gary, *What Mean These Stones?: A Centennial Celebration of Valdese, North Carolina* (1993); A Pi Mai (Lao New Year) celebration in Morganton, NC, photo by Katy Clune)

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