

# THE BUFFALO NEWS

## Immigrant newspaper aims to make newcomers feel welcome *Stories will appear in Arabic, Karen*

**By Jane Kwiatkowski Radlich** | News Staff Reporter



Rubens Mukunzi, publisher and managing editor of Karibu News, a weekly newspaper for the immigrant community, works with Editor-in-Chief Sara Ali and Creative Director Tyler Bagwell, as they prepare to send their first official issue to press in their new office on Tonawanda Street, Monday, Aug. 3, 2015. (Derek Gee/Buffalo News)

storefront on Tonawanda Street with a sandwich board just outside the door advertising for writers. Sitting with him were editor-in-chief Sara Ali, a second-generation immigrant whose parents came from Jordan and Palestine, and creative director Tyler Bagwell.

“My mother is from Tonawanda and my father is from Texas,” said Bagwell, who responded to an ad Mukunzi placed seeking a staff.

“It seemed like a fascinating opportunity to be thrown into the community after just moving here three months ago from Chicago,” the graphic designer said. “I met Rubens three weeks ago. It’s happening very quickly. Sara came on board a week after that. We’re starting making connections in the community.”

Historically, immigrant newspapers target newcomers who eventually move on to mainstream media once they learn the system, said Bagwell, who researched the topic.

“Every large immigrant group starting with the Germans, Polish, Italians had a newspaper,” said Bagwell. “And they all faded away because with each generation, people

“Karibu,” a Swahili word that means welcome, is the name of a weekly newspaper for the city’s evolving immigrant population. Its debut edition Wednesday will contain stories written in English, Karen and Arabic to help the area’s 9,723 resettled refugees.

“I chose the name Karibu News to welcome these people to their new country,” said Rubens Mukunzi, publisher and managing editor. “When immigrants get in this country, we miss our old country, but now that we all are in the same country – the best country – we realize we have the same destination as residents here.”

Rubens, who emigrated from Rwanda in 2014, sat in Karibu’s newly leased office, a

stopped speaking and reading their language.

“We have a unique situation because our newspaper is aimed at the current population and whatever that means. The top 10 languages spoken currently in Buffalo is extremely different from what it was 10 years ago.”

From 2003 to 2014, Erie County resettled 9,723 refugees, according to the Partnership for the Public Good. From 2003 to 2006, the top countries of origin for immigrants to the Buffalo region were Canada and Yemen. From 2007 to 2012, this shifted and countries more typically associated with refugees – including Burma – topped the charts.

“The Burmese had wanted to start their own newspaper,” Bagwell said. “They tried to get it going and it just lost momentum. I think we’re having some success as being a central place to go for all of these communities and be a newspaper that accepts all of them.”

The top languages spoken in the Buffalo Public School System for 2004-2005, 2009-2010 and 2013-2014 were Spanish first, Karen (Burmese) or Arabic second, and Somali or Arabic third, the partnership reported.

Meanwhile the number of students in the Buffalo schools categorized as “limited English proficient” increased from 2,539 in 2004 to 4,307 in 2014, with the number of languages spoken rising from 46 to 63.

Karibu News is reaching out to immigrants who speak the top six languages – primarily Karen and Arabic – but also Nepali, Swahili, French and Spanish.

Jeffrey Chow, an assistant professor of business at SUNY Buffalo State, said the newspaper will play a vital role in the daily lives of the nearly 10,000 immigrants who arrived since 2003.

“The newspaper is extremely important because it gives them a great way to reach out to their community,” said Chow, who himself came to this country on a scholarship two decades ago from Malaysia. “Being integrated into the Buffalo community actually empowers immigrants. A common concern for them is not finding jobs. They don’t speak English, so finding a job is difficult. They can’t read ads in English. This paper will certainly help to advertise jobs.

“My only concern is the sustainability over time. Volunteers will peter off. It’s a challenging task to run a newspaper in one language, let alone three, but if they are persistent they will succeed. Really, the acid test will be the first edition and how well it is received.”

Chow expressed concern that the editorial focus on a few languages may actually turn some immigrants off.

“In the future they may not want to be so ethnocentric,” Chow said. “By focusing on a set of languages, you may alienate some immigrants. I’m glad he’s going to publish in English. People in Buffalo may not know about their neighbors from other countries.”

Mukunzi came up with the idea to start a newspaper just six months ago. The graduate of National University of Rwanda had 15 years of experience managing a newspaper in his country.

“I didn’t have money to start a newspaper here,” Mukunzi recalled. But after creating a business plan, he received \$5,000 in seed money from Westminster Economic Development Initiative (WEDI), a nonprofit organization that supports entrepreneurs and small-business development, training and education on the West Side.

“The goal of Karibu is to integrate the refugee and immigrant population with the rest of

the population,” said Ali, the editor-in-chief who graduated from Buffalo State with a degree in media communications. “We don’t want to be their voice, we want to help them find their voice. The newspaper is an outlet for that voice.

“We’re also looking to spread awareness among locals who don’t really know a lot about their neighbors who just came into the country,” Ali added.

Articles will focus on education, access to health care, crime, police response time – and success stories immigrants like to share of just being here.

“Immigrants have nice stories about their experiences in this country,” said Mukunzi. “How they contribute to the community. Most of these people have talents, too. We want them to share and to be part of this country.”

Karibu is counting on volunteers for everything from reporting to delivery to signage.

“We’re not concerned with the physical equipment,” said Ali. “We’re fine without machines and desks. We need writers and advertisers, and we want translators and volunteers. We just need help, primarily financial support.”

“This newspaper is really a critical tool in helping to create a welcoming community in Buffalo,” said Eva Hassett, the executive director of the International Institute on Delaware Avenue. Its mission is to assist refugees and immigrants to become independent, informed and contributing members of the community.

“Erie County is growing and we know it’s very likely because of growth in the immigrant community,” Hassett said. “Population growth is a good thing, whether you’re talking about housing or workforce or education or anything. If you’re not growing your immigrant community, you’re not growing.”