



Top 25 Canadian Immigrants award winner James Atebe stands between Premier Gordon Campbell and MLA Randy Hawes on March 14, 2008. (B.C. Government)

## Award ceremony recognizes top Canadian immigrants

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The first annual Top 25 Canadian Immigrants award ceremony was held Monday in Vancouver, recognizing some of the most noteworthy new Canadians.

The awards are the brainchild of Nick Noorani, publisher of Canadian Immigrant Magazine.

"We've got people from Africa, Brazil, Romania, all across the world," Noorani said. "And we didn't choose them - Canada did."

Nominations opened in November 2008, and the magazine received about 350 candidates. A panel of judges then shortlisted 75 of the nominees, and the online public voted for the winners.

More than 10,000 Canadians participated in the vote.

**Related:** [List of the Top 25 Canadian Immigrants award winners](#)

Noorani said he created the award to recognize the difficulties of immigrating to a new country.

"What does it mean to be an immigrant in Canada?" he said. "Anyone can figure this out; go to the seventh floor and jump out the window with a handkerchief as a parachute. It's exciting, but it's also very scary because you know you're going to hit the ground with a huge thud."

Recipient Marcello Veiga is a mining engineering professor at the University of British Columbia. He says he moved from his native Brazil to find a safer life for his family.

"You don't have the violence we have in Brazil, you don't have the injustice we have in Brazil," Veiga said. "Those are major factors that pushed myself and my family to Canada."

Mission, B.C., Mayor James Atebe is also receiving an award. The Kenya native says he immigrated to pursue his dreams.

"As a 13-year-old boy in a boarding school in Kenya, I dreamt of living the cowboy and Indian experience," Atebe said.

"Since I came to Canada, I have volunteered as a cowboy in Southern Alberta and worked with the Sto:lo First Nation for 13 years."

But Noorani says the real benefit of moving to Canada is the people.

"I am constantly asked by immigrants what is the best thing about Canada, and I always say 'Canadians,'" he said.

Another ceremony will be held on Thursday in Mississauga, Ont., for the recipients from Eastern Canada. Award winners receive a commemorative certificate, a lapel pin and a \$250 donation toward the Canadian charity of their choice.

*With a report from CTV British Columbia's David Kincaid*