

Anna Crosslin named 2021 GJR/SJR Freedom Fighter

Ask Anna Crosslin, *Gateway Journalism Review's* 2021 Freedom Fighter, about Afghan resettlement, and she paints the "big picture" from decades of public service on immigration resettlement.

The retired leader of the *International Institute of St. Louis*, St. Louis' immigrant service and information hub, starts out like this: "One of the things I could look at... as we were beginning to discuss Afghan resettlement... I could look back at the Vietnamese resettlement, and also at the Bosnian resettlement programs, and better understand what some of the options might be in terms of how to be able to conduct resettlement...but also understand what some of the challenges would be."

Crosslin is one of three people who will receive awards at GJR's annual [First Amendment celebration](#) Oct. 27 at 7-8 p.m. featuring former senator and current NBC/MSNBC commentator Claire McCaskill.



Anna Crosslin

In addition to giving Crosslin the Freedom Fighter award, GJR will give St. Louis American publisher Donald Suggs its Lifetime Achievement award and environmental activist Kay Drey its Whistleblower award. [Register](#) here for the event.

Crosslin, who began her job at the Institute in 1978, had many chances to observe matters relating to immigration, and refugees in particular. “Each population has its challenges,” she said. “For the 1,000 Afghans resettling in St. Louis, the successful re-settling of large families in urban areas will be the big challenge.”

Crosslin, with the benefit of 42 years of leadership, points out, "One hundred thousand Afghans is not such a huge number...it's not that big when you look at our massive evacuation –in three waves, over three periods–of 800,000 Vietnamese."

"Freedom Fighter... I love it," Crosslin said. "That's quite a moniker. I try. I'm one of those people who tries. That would be accurate."

Nine years ago, on the occasion of Media Literacy Week, Gateway Media Literacy Partners invited Crosslin to write an essay on "Why media literacy is important." Crosslin wrote "...freedom is the one over-riding value that refugees believe is at the heart of America. In spite of this, they are sometimes shocked by the abundance of information and divergent opinions that are openly promoted in all forms of mass media. The high level of verbal and written dissent on a multitude of issues—a result of our strong democratic values which translate into support for a free press and uncensored Internet – fascinates them."

Asked if the commentary she wrote then still resonated with her, she replied,

"Yep! I would, however, change the last sentence...fascinates and **sometimes frightens them.**"

Asked if "the fight" has changed over the years, Crosslin quickly responded, "Oh, heavens...You know, with age has come an understanding that the process and the outcomes may be a lot slower, in terms of achieving goals, that is, than what I would have initially wanted. What I thought I could achieve in my 20s and what I've been able to achieve in my 70s, well... there's a measurable difference: there's not as much difference as I had hoped. "

On Crosslin's body of work: "When you look back at your body of work, your body of work isn't really just yours, it's a

product of everybody who's been working on whatever that goal happens to be over the same period.

Last year, on the announcement of her retirement, Crosslin in an interview with *St. Louis Partnership* said, "We all need to better understand that foreign-born growth is an important part of the solutions to our community's economic and social challenges in our region and work together to achieve IISTL's vision of a diverse, inclusive and thriving community."

In her retirement, Crosslin cited how grateful she is to be a Missouri Historical Society board member where she can focus on the Society's library and archives. "I want to make sure that, not just the Institute's work but the history of immigrants in St. Louis. is preserved to the greatest extent." You know, "I'm always interested in the accurate story."

On receiving word of the GJR Freedom Fighter Award, Crosslin says she was both "shocked" and "flattered." "I see this as an acknowledgement, not just for what I'm doing, but for what the International Institute does in the community. It's about sometimes telling the stories that people don't always like to hear. Whether it's because we're a little too parochial, here, or because some of these countries are far away; or because we don't necessarily think of individuals—residents of these countries—having the same values as we do. Whatever the case may be, it just seems very removed to a lot of people, so part of my life-long mission is to try to help people understand that the shared values and behaviors of these people ...well, they are us. That's what I've been fighting for."

Jessica Brown is chair of this year's First Amendment celebration and founder of the Gateway Media Literacy Partners.