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COMMUNITIES

## INS says Lee family can stay in U.S.

By Mike Kilen / Tennessean Staff Writer

Seung Lee and his family are closer to becoming American residents today. But it took the music industry, a politician and a small media campaign to persuade Immigration and Naturalization Service officials to reconsider their rules.

Lee and wife Eun Kyung, owners of Kim's Market, 1028 16th Ave. S., received word from the INS on Thursday that their petition to become permanent U.S. residents would not be revoked.

The Lees were featured in Sunday's *Tennessean* and pleaded their case on local morning radio this week. Nearly 200 loyal customers, friends and music industry employees signed a petition and U.S. Sen. Fred Thompson wrote INS officials on the Lees' behalf.

The INS caved.

And the family, including children ages 14 and 6, is overjoyed.

"I'm so happy. I'm dancing just like that" Geico ad on television, Lee said.

The Lees have lived in America for 10 years after moving from Korea. In 1994, Kyung's father, Soo Yu, who had just become a resident, petitioned for his daughter's permanent residence and was put on the INS' lengthy waiting list. During the five-year wait to get the petition processed, Yu died.

INS officials said that when a petitioner dies, the petition is revoked, which would have eventually led to the family's deportation.

Thompson wrote INS officials, pointing out that the attorney general could overrule a revocation for

"humanitarian reasons." That's what happened Thursday.

"This is great news for the Lee family," Thompson said, "and for the Nashville community which rallied around them."

Marilyn Devine, the Lees' immigration attorney, said it was odd that the INS responded so quickly.

"Congressional intervention was important and so was the package of affidavits from Music Row people."

Music industry employees and executives have long used the Korean market as a venue for a quick snack or to grab a cola between meetings or sessions.

"I hope they can now go to bed and feel content," Devine said.

The Lees still face a formal INS interview on the petition, but Devine expects it will be a formality.

"I greatly appreciate the community helping my family -- and very famous people," Lee said. "A lot of people celebrate for my family.

"Everybody happy. Everybody come in and give us a big hug."

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