

paperwork at least 6 inches high, Abby says, spent upwards of \$5,000, (and that was without a lawyer; with one, the cost would have been even higher) and drove 3,500 miles roundtrip for a face-to-face interview with immigration officials in Vancouver. All told, the process took 8 months.

"When you follow the rules of immigration, it is not easy, and it's expensive," Abby says.

Her approval, however, was one thing that did come easily. The couple arrived in Vancouver, sat down for their interview, and within just minutes were told, "Okay, you're approved." Simple as that. They felt relieved and grateful. They still had to wait for their paperwork to be processed, but were able to start house hunting.

Mike is a Milaca, Minn., native. He and Abby knew they wanted to live in Minnesota, but they didn't have any particular town in mind. Mike had just started his own marine business, so he wasn't tied down to any one place, and the two thought Lakes Country would be a good fit for them. They started looking online at houses for sale, and before long, they found one. It was in a little town called Vergas, which neither of them had ever been to before. But they visited the town, toured the house, and felt an immediate connection.

"We just loved it right from the beginning," says Abby.

They bought the house and moved to Vergas in October 2008. One of Abby's immigration stipulations was that she and Mike had to be married within 90 days of her moving to the

U.S., so they immediately started planning their wedding.

It was a busy year for the couple — they got engaged, married, moved, and Abby changed her citizenship, all within 10 months.

If anybody could pull all that off successfully, it's Abby. Abby is an excellent multi-tasker. That's a big part of what makes her such an effective Project Manager at Compass Consultants, and it's a big part of why she was hired as the new Executive Director of Kinship of the Perham Area.

At Compass, Abby works with large telecommunications companies, managing every aspect of projects big and small, such as the installation of a new tower for a wireless carrier. From the time a project order comes in to the time it's completed, she

oversees every detail, from construction to engineering and everything in between. She's talking to workers, organizing schedules, handling contracts and, most importantly, she says, building relationships. She strives to be approachable and nonjudgmental in her dealings with people.

"Being a project manager means effectively communicating what needs to be done, but also helping to resolve issues and supporting the actual people doing the work," she explains. "It's relationship-building. I have a large workload, but I'm all about organization, communication and building relationships."

Janell Gible, a friend of Abby's who has worked with her for the past several years, describes her as the kind of person who is capable of almost anything. Abby's willing to



Abby, Mike and their twin boys, Blake and Kyier.

Submitted Photo

"dive in" to projects, Janell says, "and when she does dive in, she keeps it organized and keeps things moving ahead. She's also very dedicated. When she commits to something, for work or otherwise, she's very dedicated to it."

With a background in banking, Abby learned the telecommunications business through her work at Arvig, where she landed her first job after moving to the U.S. It was also while at Arvig that she was introduced to the Kinship program, as the company encourages its employees to volunteer for Kinship's Reading Buddy program, and Abby signed up.

Kinship of the Perham Area is a nonprofit organization that serves kids throughout Otter Tail County through individual and group mentorships and planned activities between kids and caring adults. Abby took a shine to the program as a Reading Buddy volunteer, and then joined Kinship's board of directors in 2016 to get even more involved.

"I truly believe that positive role models for kids have the ability to



Abby Wallin, the new director of Kinship of the Perham Area, has a background in project management and hopes to use her organizational and relationship-building skills to create new community partnerships for Kinship. She wants to see the program flourish into the future.

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