

## HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 791

*Commending the School of the Performing Arts in the Richmond Community.*

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 1, 2013

Agreed to by the Senate, February 7, 2013

WHEREAS, the School of the Performing Arts in the Richmond Community, known as SPARC, celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2011; and

WHEREAS, founded in 1981 by visionary Richmond actress Jeri Cutler-Voltz, SPARC began with just 13 students and the mission of inspiring "young people to reach their full potential through quality training in the performing arts"; and

WHEREAS, under the exemplary leadership of Jeri Cutler-Voltz, SPARC grew to include classes for younger students, outreach programs, and production opportunities that allow students to develop their self-confidence, teamwork and problem-solving skills, and ability to give and receive constructive criticism; and

WHEREAS, following the death of Jeri Cutler-Voltz in 1998, Jennie Brown assumed the leadership of SPARC, and was soon joined by her husband, Larry Brown, who became managing director; and

WHEREAS, under their direction, SPARC continued to grow, adding two statewide programs and increasing outreach in local schools; and

WHEREAS, one outreach program, STAGES, provides in-school and after-school training for regional elementary and middle schools and neighborhood centers, while New Voices for the Theater gives Virginia high school students the opportunity to compete in a playwriting competition; and

WHEREAS, in 2008 SPARC purchased a 14,000-square-foot facility that is currently being renovated into class studios, an educational theater, offices, and community gathering and rental facility; and

WHEREAS, in 2010 Ryan Ripperton joined SPARC as its newest executive director, focusing on expanding its student base and program offerings in addition to partnering with other arts institutions; and

WHEREAS, today, SPARC, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization accessible to all, reaches more than 2,300 students annually through its core training offerings and serves children aged 3 - 18 in grades K through 12, 52 percent of whom represent minority populations and 46 percent of whom receive financial aid or participate in grants-funded programs; and

WHEREAS, SPARC students receive not only high quality training in the performing arts, but develop social and leadership skills that serve them well in whatever career they choose; the STAGES program students demonstrated a 42 percent improvement in oral language performance on the Standards of Learning; and

WHEREAS, Erin Thomas-Foley, SPARC's director of education and a noted actor with extensive experience and stage and film credit, has worked diligently to provide quality performing arts programs that also teach valuable life skills; and

WHEREAS, SPARC alumni have gone on to achieve success at school, work, and in the community and include writers, news anchors, actors and screenwriters, a Tony-nominated actress, and a Grammy-winning singer; and

WHEREAS, for over 30 years, SPARC has been at the forefront of performing arts education, inspiring youth to develop their potential and to develop a lifelong appreciation of the importance of the arts; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly commend the School of the Performing Arts in the Richmond Community on the occasion of its 30th anniversary; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to Ryan Ripperton, executive director of the School of the Performing Arts in the Richmond Community, as an expression of the General Assembly's congratulations and admiration for the school's contributions to the arts and youth of Virginia.

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