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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 1031

Offered February 17, 2017

Commending J.F. Bell Funeral Home, Inc.

Patrons—Toscano; Senator: Deeds

WHEREAS, J.F. Bell Funeral Home, Inc., Charlottesville's oldest existing business owned by people of color, is celebrating its 100th anniversary year in 2017; and

WHEREAS, J.F. Bell Funeral Home was established in 1917, by John Ferris Bell, Sr., a native of Petersburg, who was trained as a funeral director and mortician in Chicago, Illinois; and

WHEREAS, when a cousin, who was a well-known local dentist, suggested Charlottesville had a need for a mortician, John Bell moved from Chicago to establish the J.F. Bell Funeral Home, which today is the oldest family-run funeral business in central Virginia; and

WHEREAS, J.F. Bell Funeral Home's first location was on Vinegar Hill at 275 West Main Street, and, in 1925, the funeral home moved to a new building at its present location in the historic Starr Hill District; and

WHEREAS, John Bell and his wife, Maude, ran the funeral home as their family expanded, and it flourished for many years in the community where they were very socially and civically active; and

WHEREAS, known for his meticulous recordkeeping and excellent penmanship, John Bell would stay up late at night painstakingly recording all of the information needed for death records; and

WHEREAS, John Bell was a pillar of the Charlottesville community, from whom people sought advice on business, political, social, and personal issues; and

WHEREAS, John Bell's three sons, John, Jr., Henry, and Raymond, studied in Boston, apprenticed under their father, and ended up back in the family funeral home business; and

WHEREAS, John Bell, Sr., served in World War I; all of the Bell brothers served their country in the military, and made important contributions to the business, civic, and social growth of the Charlottesville community; and

WHEREAS, Raymond Bell was a visible figure in the local NAACP during the years of Massive Resistance, and he became the first African American to serve on the Charlottesville School Board; and

WHEREAS, Henry Bell was awarded the Golden Licensee Award from the Virginia Funeral Directors' Association in 2001, recognizing his 50 years of continuous service to the funeral industry; he was also a well-established entrepreneur and investor; and

WHEREAS, John Bell, Jr., was also trained as an accountant, and he reached out to and was respected by all members of the business community, transcending color barriers; and

WHEREAS, J.F. Bell Funeral Home is now proudly operated by the third generation of the Bell family, Deborah Bell Burks, and her husband, Martin, who are carrying on the family tradition of civic service and doing their part to make significant contributions to the Charlottesville community; and

WHEREAS, Martin Burks has continued the tradition of leadership in business by being awarded the 2011 Paul Goodloe McIntire Citizenship Award from the Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce; he has served as president of the Jefferson School Partners, the Jefferson School Foundation, is a board member of the Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce, and gives of his time to various other organizations; and

WHEREAS, Deborah Bell Burks has been active in the community and a member of various boards to include the Jefferson School Foundation, a founding member of the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center, and co-chair of the University of Virginia Families, and she contributes her time to various other civic organizations; and

WHEREAS, the Chamber Diversity Business Council of the Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce established the John F. Bell, Sr. Annual Vanguard Award to recognize others in the business community who are emulating the business tenacity combined with the sense of civic duty which was the legacy that began with John F. Bell, Sr.; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend J.F. Bell Funeral Home, Inc., Charlottesville's oldest existing business owned by people of color, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of its founding; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to Deborah Bell Burks of J.F. Bell Funeral Home, Inc., as an expression of the General Assembly's admiration for the business's important history of community involvement and century of service to the citizens of Charlottesville.

INTRODUCED

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