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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 439

Offered March 1, 2018

Celebrating the life of Morris Gilmore Stephenson.

Patrons—Poindexter; Senator: Stanley

WHEREAS, Morris Gilmore Stephenson, a beloved husband and father and a respected journalist who chronicled the people and events of Franklin County for more than half a century, died on October 19, 2017; and

WHEREAS, born in Marion, Morris Stephenson graduated from Marion High School, where he was a standout basketball player, and then attended Lees-McRae College in Banner Elk, North Carolina; and

WHEREAS, Morris Stephenson began his career as a newsman in 1956 when he went to work at his hometown paper, *The Smyth County News*; he later worked at *The Salem Times Register*, *The Virginian-Leader*, *The Carroll News*, *The Franklin News-Post*, and the *Franklin County Times*, often serving as a co-owner or managing editor as well as a reporter; and

WHEREAS, known for his smooth writing style and talent for finding interesting stories, Morris Stephenson penned news, features, and sports coverage during his journalism career; one of his favorite topics was Franklin County's moonshine industry, a subject he later revisited in his 2011 book: *A Night of Makin' Likker and Other Stories from the Moonshine Capital of the World*; and

WHEREAS, in 1982, Morris Stephenson left the newspaper business and spent nearly two decades working in marketing and public relations for the stock car industry at Franklin County Speedway, Natural Bridge Speedway, Log Cabin Raceway, Pulaski County Speedway, and Lonesome Pine Raceway; he also co-authored a book about racing titled *From Dust To Glory*; and

WHEREAS, after leaving the racing industry in 1999, Morris Stephenson returned to work as a photographer and journalist for *The Franklin News-Post*; he remained at the paper for the rest of his life and wrote a popular weekly column called "Down the River"; and

WHEREAS, Morris Stephenson was a member of the Franklin County Recreation Commission and a former athletics coach at Boones Mill Elementary School; an avid paddler who enjoyed exploring the rivers of Franklin County in his canoe, he was instrumental in reviving the canoeing event, the Pigg River Ramble, and in forming Creek Freaks Paddling Club; and

WHEREAS, Morris Stephenson received numerous honors during his career, including the 2005 Marshall L. Flora Award from the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce; in 2015, the Retail Merchants Association selected him to serve as grand marshal of the Franklin County Christmas Parade; and

WHEREAS, throughout his distinguished career, Morris Stephenson won the respect of his readers and colleagues for his insight, integrity, and commitment to community journalism; and

WHEREAS, Morris Stephenson will be fondly remembered and dearly missed by his children, Mike, Kurt, and Kathy Stephenson, and Kimberly Bentley, and their families; his stepdaughters, Debra Huff, Polly Peters, Teresa Patterson, and Peggy Brown, and their families; his siblings, Sandra Archer and Stafford Stephenson; and many other family members, friends throughout the region, and Franklin County residents; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby note with great sadness the loss of Morris Gilmore Stephenson, a talented journalist and a pillar of the Franklin County community; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the family of Morris Gilmore Stephenson as an expression of the General Assembly's respect for his memory.

INTRODUCED

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