

2023 SESSION

ENROLLED

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 814

Commending Barter Theatre.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 21, 2023
Agreed to by the Senate, February 23, 2023

WHEREAS, Barter Theatre in Abingdon, the State Theatre of Virginia and the longest running professional Actors' Equity Association theater in the United States, proudly celebrates its 90th anniversary in 2023; and

WHEREAS, the earliest known theatrical event at the Barter Theatre was a production of *The Virginian* on January 14, 1876, but it wasn't until 1933, during the Great Depression, when actor and Southwest Virginia native Robert Porterfield had the idea to open a theater that invited patrons to barter for admission with fresh produce, that the Barter Theatre was born; and

WHEREAS, the Barter Theatre opened on June 10, 1933, with a production of *After Tomorrow*, earning its name by welcoming patrons with the slogan, "With vegetables you cannot sell, you can buy a good laugh," accepting either 40 cents or an equivalent amount of produce for admission; and

WHEREAS, Robert Porterfield and his crew furnished the Barter Theatre with seats, lighting fixtures, carpeting, paintings, tapestries, and more that had been salvaged from the Empire Theatre in New York City prior to its destruction, including a lighting system that had been designed and installed by Thomas Edison; and

WHEREAS, in 1946, the Barter Theatre was designated the State Theatre of Virginia, becoming the first professional theatre to attain this status; 15 years later, the Barter Theatre opened a second stage across the street in what came to be known as the Barter Stage II building, now called Barter's Smith Theatre; and

WHEREAS, the Barter Theatre produced plays by such notable playwrights as Noel Coward, Tennessee Williams, and Thornton Wilder, all of whom accepted Virginia hams as payment for royalties, as well as George Bernard Shaw, a vegetarian, who received spinach as his royalty; and

WHEREAS, the Barter Theatre now offers a wide range of educational opportunities for individuals of all ages and hosts the annual Appalachian Festival of Plays and Playwrights to share the area's rich cultural heritage; and

WHEREAS, the Barter Theatre has won numerous accolades and awards over the years, including an Antoinette Perry "Tony" Award for regional theater in 1948 and a Virginia Governor's Award for excellence in art in 1979, and is the only organization in the Commonwealth to have been recognized twice by Dominion Energy ArtStars Awards; and

WHEREAS, the Barter Theatre has been an integral part of the Southwest Virginia cultural landscape for nearly a century, garnering esteem and admiration from Virginians throughout the Commonwealth; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend the Barter Theatre on the occasion of its 90th anniversary; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the Barter Theatre as an expression of the General Assembly's admiration for the theater's history of contributions to Southwest Virginia and the Commonwealth.

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