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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 365

Offered February 13, 2012

Celebrating the life of the Honorable Peter George Decker, Jr.

Patrons—Joannou, Alexander, Cosgrove, Howell, A.T., Iaquinto, James, Jones, Knight, Lewis, Purkey, Spruill, Stolle, Tata, Villanueva and Watts; Senators: Blevins, Locke, Lucas, McWaters, Miller, Y.B., Northam and Wagner

WHEREAS, the Honorable Peter George Decker, Jr., a beloved resident of the City of Norfolk whose legendary love and enthusiasm for his hometown and its residents earned him the nickname "Uncle Pete," died on February 3, 2012; and

WHEREAS, the son of Peter George Decker, Sr., and Rose Decker, Peter Decker grew up in Lamberts Point alongside six siblings and never forgot his roots, maintaining close ties with family members and childhood friends throughout his life; and

WHEREAS, Peter Decker worked his way through the Norfolk Division of The College of William & Mary as a singer and then received a law degree from the Marshall-Wythe School of Law at The College of William & Mary; and

WHEREAS, in 1961 Peter Decker attended a dance at Norfolk's Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral and a beautiful young woman named Bess Kolantis caught his eye; within the year, the pair married, beginning a nearly 50-year marriage marked by mutual devotion and love; and

WHEREAS, a hardworking attorney, Peter Decker founded the law firm of Decker, Cardon, Thomas, Weintraub, & Neskis, PC, with the goal of helping people; he built the practice into one of the city's top firms and also branched into real estate, eventually owning dozens of buildings across the Tidewater area; and

WHEREAS, known and respected for his love and knowledge of the law, Peter Decker served as a substitute judge, presiding with great fairness, compassion, and commitment to justice and providing wise counsel to those who came before the bench; and

WHEREAS, called upon by governors of both parties, Peter Decker served the Commonwealth in various capacities, including as the chair of the Virginia State Board of Corrections and as a member of the State Board of Education, Virginia Alcohol Safety Action Program, and Virginia Criminal Sentencing Commission; and

WHEREAS, passionate about his hometown, Peter Decker, who possessed an extraordinary ability to build consensus and forge strong relationships with others, played a pivotal role in the revitalization of downtown Norfolk; and

WHEREAS, Peter Decker worked alongside city leaders and residents to help create the city's Downtown Improvement District and served as a member of the Downtown Norfolk Council and other related civic organizations; and

WHEREAS, Peter Decker served as chair of the Norfolk Airport Authority, member of the board of visitors of Norfolk State University, and member of the board of TowneBank Norfolk, the advisory board of Heritage Bank and Trust, and the Greater Norfolk Corporation; and

WHEREAS, as chair of the board of Nauticus, Peter Decker had a deep appreciation for the area's great natural resources and annually hosted a day at the museum for area schoolchildren, known as "Pete's Kids," who had excelled in their studies; and

WHEREAS, after his wife, Bess, saw Chicago's famed Cows on Parade exhibit and suggested the use of mermaids as a symbol of Norfolk, Peter Decker worked with city officials and today, more than 100 of the statues grace the city, with several more in Norfolk's sister cities around the world; and

WHEREAS, committed to the health and well-being of his fellow Tidewater area residents, Peter Decker served on the board of directors of Eastern Virginia Medical School Health Services and as a committed supporter of the American Cancer Society; and

WHEREAS, Peter Decker loved to sing and performed alongside famed actor and singer and fellow Lebanese American Danny Thomas, who later asked him to chair fundraising in Southeast Virginia for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital; and

WHEREAS, Peter Decker's contributions to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital are legendary—he raised tens of millions of dollars for the institution over the course of several decades—funding that led to groundbreaking research and treatment that impacted the lives of countless individuals; and

WHEREAS, Peter Decker partnered with Norfolk Coffee and Tea Company to create Uncle Pete's Gourmet Coffee, recorded albums with the Pat Curtis Orchestra, and golfed at the Bruce Rader/St. Jude Golf Tournament, all to benefit St. Jude Children's Research Hospital; and

WHEREAS, Peter Decker was the recipient of numerous awards in recognition of his exemplary

57 community service, including induction into the Hampton Roads Business Hall of Fame; he received the
58 the inaugural L.D. Britt Community Service Award, 1997 Martin Luther King Leadership Award from
59 the NAACP, 1998 First Citizen Award from the Cosmopolitan Club of Norfolk, 1998 Sertoma Club
60 Service to Mankind Award, 2001 Volunteer Hampton Roads Lenora Mathews Lifetime Achievement
61 Award, 2011 Downtown Norfolk Council Lifetime Achievement Award, and 2011 Virginia Sheriffs'
62 Association Citizen of the Year Award; and

63 WHEREAS, a familiar figure in the city, Peter Decker never met a stranger, greeting others with his
64 signature "How ya doing, baby" and shaking hands, and never said no to a request for help, often
65 working quietly behind the scenes to help someone find a job or solve financial problems; and

66 WHEREAS, at his passing, the depth and breadth of Peter Decker's influence and generosity were
67 evident as thousands gathered to pay tribute to Norfolk's native son, a man who lived the American
68 dream and dedicated himself to the well-being and prosperity of his hometown; and

69 WHEREAS, a devoted husband and father who often said that "family isn't everything—it's the
70 ONLY thing," Peter Decker will be greatly missed by his beloved and caring wife of 49 years, Bess;
71 children, Peter III, Paul, and Phil, and their families; numerous other family members and friends; and
72 the residents of the City of Norfolk; now, therefore, be it

73 RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby
74 note with great sadness the loss of one of Norfolk's most beloved citizens, a distinguished attorney and
75 judge, devoted public servant, and noted philanthropist, the Honorable Peter George Decker, Jr.; and, be
76 it

77 RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution
78 for presentation to the family of the Honorable Peter George Decker, Jr., as an expression of the
79 General Assembly's abiding respect for his memory.