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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 395

Offered February 27, 2014

Commemorating the 100th anniversary of the birth of Harold Leslie Warner, Jr.

Patron—O'Bannon

WHEREAS, Harold Leslie Warner, Jr., was born on April 9, 1914, in Texas, and moved to Richmond in 1921; he graduated from Thomas Jefferson High School and was the school's first drum major; and

WHEREAS, at the age of 11, Harold Warner suffered partial paralysis and began playing the organ as a means to help strengthen his left arm; he was a natural musician who played by ear with no technical training; and

WHEREAS, in 1932, at the age of 18, Harold Warner restored the historic Trinity Methodist Church organ, built in 1839 by Henry Erben, one of the most eminent American organ builders of the 19th century; at the time, the Trinity Methodist Church organ was the oldest in Richmond and one of the oldest organs in the country; and

WHEREAS, Trinity Methodist Church acquired the organ in 1861, shortly after the church was built in 1860 at 20th and Broad Streets, and Harold Warner was organist of Trinity Methodist Church from 1933 to 1935; Trinity Methodist Church relocated to Forest Avenue in Henrico County in 1945; and

WHEREAS, in 1950, the Wurlitzer pipe organ in the Landmark Theatre (formerly known as the Mosque and also the Richmond Civic Center) was to be junked when the City of Richmond was unable to fund the estimated \$30,000 needed to recondition the instrument after years of neglect; Harold Warner volunteered his services to save the organ; and

WHEREAS, Harold Warner and other volunteers, notably William Spencer Jones, spent nearly two years of their own time repairing and refurbishing the organ; the city was billed just \$32.50 for parts; and

WHEREAS, after Harold Warner completed repairs to the organ, the magnificent instrument was widely heard over nationally broadcast concerts and through recordings by international and local artists, including Reginald Foort of the British Broadcasting System and Richmond's own Eddie Weaver; these broadcasts and recordings brought fame to the City of Richmond and the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, Harold Warner was presented the Sertoma Club Award for Service to Mankind in April 1954 by the Mayor of Richmond, Dr. Edward E. Haddock, in recognition of his work to restore the organ; and

WHEREAS, Harold Warner was a valued Bell Telephone employee for over 26 years; in November 1953, Harold Warner played during the Bell Telephone Company presentation of the 50 millionth telephone to President Dwight D. Eisenhower; and

WHEREAS, on March 15, 1954, Harold Warner was featured performing on the mighty pipe organ during a live broadcast of the *Bell Telephone Hour* radio show, heard coast to coast in the United States; and

WHEREAS, the Bell Telephone Company featured Harold Warner in a full-page advertisement that was published in many national magazines during the 1950s, recognizing him as one of the company's outstanding employees who gave of his own time and talents to help his community; and

WHEREAS, Harold Warner entertained thousands of Virginians as the organist of the Byrd Theatre from 1958 to 1961; and

WHEREAS, Harold Warner was an active member of the Association of Theatre Organ Enthusiasts, now known as the American Theatre Organ Society; he worked tirelessly to arrange the June 1961 national meeting of the group in Richmond; this was the first national meeting of the organization to be held on the East Coast and attracted a record attendance of over 400 members from across the country; and

WHEREAS, Harold Warner passed away on February 14, 1961; he brought great honor to the Commonwealth through his craftsmanship, talent, dedication, and community service; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of Harold Leslie Warner, Jr.; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the American Theatre Organ Society as an expression of the General Assembly's gratitude to the organization for its dedication to the preservation of historic theatre organs.

INTRODUCED

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