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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 176

Offered February 24, 2016

Commending Gulf Branch Nature Center.

Patrons—Favola, Ebbin and Howell; Delegates: Hope, Levine, Lopez and Sullivan

WHEREAS, established in 1966, Gulf Branch Nature Center was the first nature center in Arlington County, and it provides opportunities for the study of conservation and nature in a rare, surviving 1920s fieldstone and quartz bungalow, nestled in the 38-acre Gulf Branch stream valley; and

WHEREAS, the creation of Gulf Branch Nature Center was the impetus for the larger and subsequent movement for park and greenspace preservation in Arlington County—a response to high-density development of the Rosslyn-Ballston Metro corridor and the construction of I-66 through the county—which led to the establishment of Long Branch Nature Center in 1972 and the Nature Center at Potomac Overlook Regional Park in 1974; and

WHEREAS, Gulf Branch Nature Center has generated strong community involvement and support throughout its 50 year history, as demonstrated by its dedication to providing essential and critically needed park space to help rectify the county's imbalance between active and passive public space uses, as identified by a 1962 report by the Northern Virginia Regional Planning and Economic Development Commission; and

WHEREAS, the Women's Club of Arlington sponsored the Junior Naturalist Club at Gulf Branch Nature Center in 1972, donating a reference library of more than 200 books (including Braille editions) and a Touch and See Trail for visitors with visual impairments or physical disabilities; and

WHEREAS, the Walker Cabin at Gulf Branch Nature Center was dedicated in 1979 and used materials from the original Robert Walker home near Walker's Chapel through the generosity of Preston Caruthers; and

WHEREAS, the establishment in 1980 of the Blacksmith Guild Cabin, still active and operating today, has helped to keep the art form alive and to educate both children and adults about the historic local blacksmithing industry and the skill of blacksmiths; and

WHEREAS, located on the site of a former Native American fishing camp, Gulf Branch Nature Center has served several roles over the years, from an early 20th century woodland retreat (including its legendary connection to the 1930s silent movie star, Pola Negri) to a pioneering and living symbol of the 1960s conservation and environmental movement; its ongoing role as a center for family and seasonal celebrations, environmental education, and the enjoyment of nature draws thousands of visitors to Northern Virginia each year; and

WHEREAS, Gulf Branch Nature Center continues to demonstrate its strong community, cultural, environmental, and educational commitment through the current renovation of its Native American Room, to be funded by a public-private partnership between Arlington County and the Friends of Gulf Branch Nature Center; and

WHEREAS, the Native American Room at Gulf Branch Nature Center is one of only two sites in Northern Virginia included on the Virginia Indian Heritage Trail, and its exhibits include a collection of woodland artifacts and descriptive interpretations of pre-contact Native life in the area, providing educational experiences for adults, school groups, and casual visitors; and

WHEREAS, the Gulf Branch Nature Center's educational programs have instilled a love of nature in thousands of children and adults, the center's exhibits and animals have been as important to the lives of local families as the tranquil wooded stream valley it sits in, and the nature center's innovative hands-on philosophy has continued to provide for the exploration of nature for people of all ages across many generations; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend Gulf Branch Nature Center on the occasion of its 50th anniversary on June 12, 2016, for its historic and unique role in protecting and promoting Arlington County's parklands and greenspace; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to Gulf Branch Nature Center as an expression of the General Assembly's admiration for the center's work to build and enhance the community's social, environmental, and educational values for children, families, and all county residents.

INTRODUCED

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