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HOUSE RESOLUTION

2 WHEREAS, The members of the Illinois House of
3 Representatives are pleased to recognize milestone events in
4 the lives of the citizens of the State of Illinois; and

5 WHEREAS, It has come to our attention that Valeri DeCastris
6 has been inducted into the Italian American Hall of Fame by the
7 Greater Rockford Italian American Association (GRIAA) in
8 recognition of her dedication and service to Rockford's
9 Italian-American community and her efforts at promoting and
10 preserving the Italian cultural significance of South
11 Rockford, the area where most early Italian immigrants settled;
12 this is the organization's highest honor; and

13 WHEREAS, GRIAA is a non-profit, volunteer educational
14 organization that has existed for over 40 years, and its
15 mission is to promote the Italian culture, sponsor social
16 events and activities, and perform works of charity and
17 philanthropy; and

18 WHEREAS, Valeri DeCastris was born in Rockford to Valentino
19 and Patricia Macaluso DeCastris in 1956; her father was a
20 full-time professional musician, and her mother taught dance at
21 Arthur Murray Studios; her paternal grandparents immigrated
22 from Rockford's sister city of Ferentino, Italy; they lived in

1 South Rockford next to the childhood home of the late
2 Representative E.J. "Zeke" Giorgi, Rockford's longtime State
3 Representative with whom she had family ties; her maternal
4 grandparents were of Sicilian origin and part of the great U.S.
5 migration northward from the south, leaving New Orleans,
6 Louisiana for Chicago and then South Rockford; and

7 WHEREAS, Valeri DeCastris and her husband, David Beccue,
8 received master's degrees from Southern Illinois University at
9 Carbondale and the University of Illinois at Springfield
10 respectively; she served as a research associate for a support
11 services agency of the Illinois General Assembly, as an adjunct
12 professor of physical sciences, and as an environmental
13 scientist for the State and private sectors; David is an
14 assistant site superintendent at Rock Cut State Park; and

15 WHEREAS, Valeri DeCastris, along with David, restored her
16 paternal grandparents' home in South Rockford, which was built
17 in 1923, and relocated there from Springfield, becoming active
18 participants in the revitalization of the area they have named
19 the Ethnic Village; and

20 WHEREAS, Valeri DeCastris has a distinguished record of
21 volunteer service throughout Illinois, serving in leadership
22 positions on several boards of local and statewide non-profit
23 organizations and helping to improve communities, including

1 her hometown of Rockford; she has been an active contributor to
2 land use planning and business development in Rockford and has
3 volunteered her time for numerous civic projects; and

4 WHEREAS, Valeri DeCastris is the recipient of a National
5 Make A Difference Day Award, the Spirit of Caring Award from
6 the Crusader Clinic of Rockford, and local awards from civic
7 and non-profit organizations for her community service to our
8 State; and

9 WHEREAS, Valeri DeCastris, along with David, established
10 the Ethnic Village Neighborhood Organization that has
11 beautified and improved South Rockford with grants and private
12 donations, creating Immigrants Park and installing flower
13 planters, hanging banners, flower baskets, and signage at the
14 neighborhood's gateway to downtown Rockford; and

15 WHEREAS, Valeri DeCastris has helped to keep the ethnic
16 traditions and contributions of Rockford's Italian-American
17 community alive; she initiated discussions that culminated in
18 Speaker Michael Madigan's inception of the Zeke Giorgi Memorial
19 Internship Program at the University of Illinois at
20 Springfield; she has written several articles on Rockford's
21 Italian-American community in local publications and the
22 press; and

1 WHEREAS, In 2006, Valeri DeCastris spearheaded the
2 creation of an Italian Sister City partnership between Rockford
3 and Ferentino, Italy, made possible by the DeCastris/Giorgi
4 family connections in America and Italy; she established a
5 committee that sponsors adult and youth exchanges, educational
6 programs, and cultural exhibits; and

7 WHEREAS, For over two decades, Valeri DeCastris and David
8 have worked as ticket booth attendants at Festa Italiana, which
9 is sponsored by GRIAA and is Rockford's second-largest
10 festival; she has served on GRIAA's Board of Directors for
11 several years; and

12 WHEREAS, Valeri DeCastris was instrumental in the
13 inclusion of the Italian American immigrant experience in
14 Rockford's Midway Village Museum and Conference Center's
15 largest exhibition, "Many Voices, One Community," and is
16 featured in the museum; and

17 WHEREAS, Valeri DeCastris is an active volunteer in the
18 Rockford Catholic Diocese's designated Italian parish of St.
19 Anthony of Padua in South Rockford, where her family has been
20 members since the early 1900s; she assisted the City of
21 Rockford in securing a grant from the Illinois First Program
22 for decorative street lamps around the church, which evolved
23 into an award-winning bronze statuary "memory garden," where

1 its school and gymnasium once stood; therefore, be it

2 RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE
3 HUNDRED FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that
4 we congratulate Valeri DeCastris on her induction into the
5 Italian American Hall of Fame by the Greater Rockford Italian
6 American Association and commend her efforts at preserving the
7 Italian heritage of Rockford; and be it further

8 RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be
9 presented to Valeri DeCastris as an expression of our esteem
10 and respect.