



SR1487

LRB101 23147 LAW 74283 r

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SENATE RESOLUTION

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WHEREAS, The members of the Illinois Senate are saddened to learn of the death of Bernard F. "Bernie" Gerl of Joliet, who passed away on November 7, 2020; and

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WHEREAS, Bernie Gerl was born in Joliet on October 12, 1926; he attended St. Joseph Grade School; he graduated from Joliet Township High School in 1944; he served in the U.S. Army Air Forces in the post-war Pacific Theater, where he rose to the rank of sergeant and served as an athletic instructor and baseball player; he toured the Pacific while entertaining the troops in the Goodwill Games against other service teams and traveling squads of the Major League ballplayers; he was honorably discharged in 1946; and

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WHEREAS, Bernie Gerl was signed out of high school by the St. Louis Cardinals in 1944 and began his baseball career immediately in Salisbury, Maryland, until his military service interrupted his career for the next two years; upon his return stateside, he was assigned by the Cardinals to Lynchburg, Virginia in 1947; he was assigned to the Duluth Dukes, the Cardinals Class C team, in 1948; he was named a Northern League All-Star; a few weeks later, he was with the Dukes when they were involved in one of the worst accidents in U.S. team sports history; their bus was hit head-on by a dry ice truck just

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1 north of St. Paul, which resulted in an explosion that killed
2 six people; he suffered critical injuries, including severe
3 internal and external burns; he unsuccessfully attempted to
4 resume his baseball career in Houston, Texas and Montgomery,
5 Alabama in 1950; he returned to Joliet, where he took a job at
6 the prison and opened a bar; during a fishing trip, he stopped
7 by the ballpark in Duluth and was asked by the Dukes' manager
8 to help the team for the rest of the season in 1952; he
9 accepted and spent the rest of the year as a catcher in Duluth;
10 he returned to Duluth in 1953; he retired from baseball and
11 returned to Joliet to raise his family at the age of 27; and

12 WHEREAS, In 1955, Bernie Gerl began his nearly 40-year
13 career with the Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Chicago at the
14 local bottling plant, now the site of the Crest Hill Village
15 Hall; during his tenure, he managed nearly every Coca-Cola
16 bottling plant in Chicago, from Niles to Markham; he retired as
17 vice president in 1993; and

18 WHEREAS, Bernie Gerl maintained an active schedule after
19 retirement; he golfed several times a week; he served as a
20 commissioner on the Joliet Park District Board and was
21 appointed to the Joliet Plan Commission; he was a member of the
22 Moose Lodge and a longtime member of the Old Timers Baseball
23 Association of Will County, where he held several executive
24 positions; he donated his time by restringing baseball gloves

1 free of charge in Joliet from 1965 to about 2010; he enjoyed
2 yearly visits to see his son and family in Minnesota; he was a
3 yearly visitor to the still-operating Wade Stadium in Duluth
4 until 2015, where the current team, the Duluth Huskies, named a
5 night in his honor, and fans were given a Bernie Gerl
6 bobblehead doll; and

7 WHEREAS, Bernie Gerl was known as one of the first
8 professional catchers to wear eyeglasses and as a power hitting
9 lefty with a rocket for an arm who batted clean-up for the
10 Duluth Dukes; he will be remembered as a perfect example of a
11 life well lived; and

12 WHEREAS, Bernie Gerl was preceded in death by his parents,
13 Andrew and Mary Rose (Terlep) Gerl; his siblings, Marie (Gib)
14 Bauer, Andy (Betty) Gerl, Don (LaVerne) Gerl, and Jim (Mary)
15 Gerl; his parents-in-law, Frank and Julia (Matichak) Tomac; and
16 his brother-in-law, Frank (Delores) Tomac; and

17 WHEREAS, Bernie Gerl is survived by his wife of 71 years,
18 Bernadine (Tomac) Gerl; his children, Bill (Patt) Gerl, Diane
19 (Jim) Blackburn, and Chuck (Cindi) Gerl; his nine
20 grandchildren, Bill (Dana) Gerl, Erin (Chad) Adamson, Meaghan
21 Gerl, Lauren (Tim) Morris, Kevin (Sarah) Blackburn, Ryan
22 Blackburn, Ben Gerl, Cate Gerl, and Adam Gerl; his nine
23 great-grandchildren, Jake, Reece, Tate, Katelyn, Maddie,

1 Blake, Luke, Emily, and Casey; his numerous nieces and nephews;
2 and his loyal friends, Harlow Lockwood, Jim Greenan, Ray
3 McShane, Lou Clavenna, and Tom Dedin; therefore, be it

4 RESOLVED, BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED FIRST GENERAL
5 ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that we mourn the passing of
6 Bernard F. "Bernie" Gerl and extend our sincere condolences to
7 his family, friends, and all who knew and loved him; and be it
8 further

9 RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be
10 presented to the family of Bernie Gerl as an expression of our
11 deepest sympathy.