



SR1005

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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 Willis Gamble Johnson of Downers Grove, who passed away on August 16, 2023 at the age of 86; and

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WHEREAS, Willis Johnson was a lifelong resident of Downers Grove and was born to Elizabeth Gable and Willis "Abbot" Johnson on January 11, 1937; and

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WHEREAS, Willis Johnson graduated from Downers Grove Community High School in 1955 and continued his education at Western Michigan University, graduating in 1959; early in his career, he served as a sergeant in the Army National Guard before working at International Harvester as a time study engineer; and

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WHEREAS, Willis Johnson founded Johnson Printers with his brother, Ross, before becoming co-founder and president of Classic Cinemas/Tivoli Enterprises, which has grown to include 16 theater locations, including the historic Tivoli in Downers Grove; and

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WHEREAS, Willis Johnson's strong work ethic and relentless dedication helped grow Classic Cinemas into the largest movie theater chain based in Illinois; he adored restoring old

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1 buildings and converting them into valuable additions to the  
2 surrounding community; and

3 WHEREAS, Willis Johnson always prioritized community  
4 involvement and was very active in business, historic, and  
5 civic organizations in Downers Grove, Elmhurst, Oak Park, and  
6 other towns where he owned theaters; and

7 WHEREAS, Willis Johnson received countless honors for his  
8 service, including being inducted into the Elmhurst Civic Hall  
9 of Fame in 2002 and being chosen as Downers Grove Citizen of  
10 the Year in 2010; he and his wife, Shirley, were honored by the  
11 Downers Grove Historical Society as Historians of the Year in  
12 2023 and were featured in a documentary film entitled History  
13 Happens Here: The Tivoli Theater; and

14 WHEREAS, Willis Johnson was proud to have his son, Chris,  
15 continue the legacy of the company he helped build; he also  
16 served as a past president of the National Association of  
17 Theater Owners of Illinois; and

18 WHEREAS, In his youth, Willis Johnson loved cars and was  
19 known around town for his sky blue 1937 Ford with a white  
20 leather interior, a car which he fixed and customized; in his  
21 later years, he appreciated the beauty of flowers, frequently  
22 incorporating landscaping along theater entries, parking lots,

1 and his own yard; and

2 WHEREAS, Willis Johnson enjoyed weekends at Lake Holiday  
3 with his family and had an extensive collection of Lego sets  
4 that he liked to build in his spare time; and

5 WHEREAS, Willis Johnson was preceded in death by his  
6 sister, Sara Homberg, and his brother-in-law, Robert Griffin;  
7 and

8 WHEREAS, Willis Johnson is survived by his wife of 46  
9 years, Shirley; his children, Stephen Johnson, Kay Johnson,  
10 Chris Johnson, Wendy Leick, and Amy Balicki; his stepchildren,  
11 Mary Reichl and Richard Winters; and his 14 grandchildren;  
12 therefore, be it

13 RESOLVED, BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED THIRD GENERAL  
14 ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that we mourn the passing of  
15 Willis Gamble Johnson and extend our sincere condolences to  
16 his family, friends, and all who knew and loved him; and be it  
17 further

18 RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be  
19 presented to the family of Willis Johnson as an expression of  
20 our deepest sympathy.