



City of Chicago



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Sponsor(s): Harris (8)
Type: Resolution
Title: Tribute to late Herbert Rogers Kent
Committee(s) Assignment:

**A City Council Resolution Celebrating the Life and Legacy
of Herbert Rogers Kent aka "The Cool Gent"**

WHEREAS, Almighty God in His infinite wisdom and judgment has called home Herbert Rogers Kent, an outstanding citizen and friend, to his everlasting reward in Heaven, and he departed this life doing what he loved most; and

WHEREAS, This august body has been informed of this esteemed man's passing by the Honorable Michelle A. Harris, Alderman of the 8th Ward; and

WHEREAS, Chicago's great radio music icon, and widely beloved legendary music personality and community leader, Mr. Herbert Rogers Kent, passed on to rhythm-and-blues heaven on Saturday, October 22, 2016 after finishing his final weekly radio show broadcast on iHeartMedia's V103 FM, his musical home for over a quarter-century; and

WHEREAS, Herb Kent, also known as "The Cool Gent," and the "King of the Dusties", was a celebrated legendary Chicago radio DJ, who possessed a melodious deep voice, coupled with a smooth soothing style; and over his storied 70+-year career helped launch the musical careers of black music greats such as The Temptations, Curtis Mayfield, Smokey Robinson, singer/songwriter Gene "Duke of Earl" Chandler, songbird Minnie Riperton, and many, many others; and

WHEREAS, Herbert Rogers Kent was born Oct. 5, 1928, at the former Cook County Hospital, now known as Stroger Hospital. Kent was a South Side native, who grew up in the Ida B. Wells housing project. Kent noted over the years that he entered earth the same year as many other notables, including: the late poet Maya Angelou, R&B singer Fats Domino, actress Shirley Temple, as well as cultural icons Mickey Mouse, Rice Krispies cereal, the ever-popular Louisiana Hot Sauce and penicillin. He enjoyed his long-standing profession, while denying that he was among the earliest humans ever created, despite rumors to the contrary; and

WHEREAS, Kent attended Hyde Park High School and started spinning records as a music-loving teenager, has over the years, been fondly described as one of the earliest African-American "crossover DJ pioneer" and considered one of the most important figures in Chicago radio history; and

WHEREAS, Herb Kent was more than a radio legend Chicago. He was widely known as an intelligent, kind-hearted social justice and civil-rights activist, very involved in the community, particularly concerned with encouraging and helping young people to understand the importance of education, through his "Stay in the Schools" campaign. He was also considered a brilliant and innovative genius who first honed his DJ skills by re-assembling used surplus World War II parts to make his own microphones as a young man; and

WHEREAS, Kent started his radio career hosting a classical music program for local public-radio station WBEZ. In the late 1940s, he played records at WGRY in Gary, Indiana and acted in radio dramas for WMAQ. Between 1955 and 1960, Kent developed a show on WBEE in Chicago devoted to a format he called "dusty records" - - and hence, the legend was born; and

WHEREAS, Between 1962 and 1970 he was the undeniable 'star of stars' at the iconic WVON-AM, a member of the beloved 'Good Guys', which included such legendary personalities as E. Rodney Jones, Wesley South and Pervis Spann 'the Blues Man', who comprised the first core group of WVON personalities, as well as Lucky Cordell and Bernadine C. Washington - all of whose stamp of radio approval initiated the careers of numerous entertainment stars and music royalty; and

WHEREAS, Herb Kent 'the Cool Gent' helped lead these proud, politically-aware band of African American disc jockeys and producers, both men and women - - - who helped WVON radio evolve into "The Voice of a Nation" during the freedom movement during the 1960's. The 'Good Guys' became the city's most influential tastemakers during the Motown era. Herb stayed current with changing music trends - - played new-wave hits popular in black clubs on his innovative early-80s show *Stay Up and Punk Out*, which influenced Chicago's own then emerging house-music scene. In many ways, WVON was as integral as today's FaceBook and Twitter on the radio dial for the latest breaking news about the Civil Rights Movement; and the hottest soul sounds from Motown, the nation's epicenter of Black music; and

WHEREAS, Music promoter and Motown CEO Berry Gordy made sure that every song he produced went directly to WVON and Herb Kent's playlist first! Everyone understood that when a song got played on WVON, word quickly spread across the nation that another hot chart-climber just blew in from the 'windy city'-Chicago. He was also a mentor to Don "Soul Train" Cornelius; and

WHEREAS, Over the years, Herb Kent also perfected his on-air comic genius, developing memorable characters like the "Gym Shoe Creeper", the "Wahoo Man," and the "Electric Crazy People", all of whom delighted and sometimes playfully frightened audiences throughout Chicago and across the U.S.; and

WHEREAS, Herb was recognized by the Guinness Book of World Records as the longest-running DJ on earth -- he virtually ruled the airwaves for an astounding 72 years. The recipient of countless music industry awards and honors, Kent was also inducted into the Chicago-based Radio Hall of Fame in 1995, and earlier this year received a Lifetime Achievement recognition during the Chicago Defender's 2016 Men of Excellence Awards ceremony. In addition, he was affectionately known as 'the Mayor of Bronzeville', and has a street named in his honor, "Herb Kent Drive," in the city's historic Bronzeville neighborhood; and

However, he was so much more than that to the city that loved him, his international legion of adoring and passionately loyal fans, and the artists whose careers he helped establish. He was a one of a kind entertainment genius, who will be deeply missed by all who knew and revered his

WHEREAS, Herb Kent departed this life on and leaves to cherish his legacy and joyful memories his loving family, countless friends and famous music industry names as well as tens of thousands of fans across Chicago and the world. Herb Kent was an institution and one of Chicago's greatest treasures; and

THEREFORE, Be It Resolved, That we, the Mayor and members of the City Council of the City of Chicago, gathered here in assembly this first day of November, 2016, A.D., do hereby express our sorrow on the passing of Herbert Rogers Kent, aka the "Cool Gent" and extend to his family our sincere condolences; and

Be It Further Resolved, That a suitable copy of this resolution be prepared and presented to the family of Herbert Rogers Kent.



Michelle A. Harris, Alderman - 8th Ward

