



Office of the City Clerk

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Legislation Text

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CONGRATULATIONS EXTENDED TO ABENAJUAN BROWN IN CELEBRATION OF 40 YEARS OF DISINGUISHED SERVICE IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTS

WHEREAS, Abena Joan Brown, who has served for 40 years as co-founder, president and producer of eta Creative Arts Foundation, the South Side institution that has helped foster the careers of many African-American writers, actors, directors and other theater artist; and

WHEREAS, Abena Joan Brown, a fervent Afrocentric spirit, produced more than 150 shows at eta; and

WHEREAS, as a visionary, she understood at the early age of 3 the importance of the arts to the African American community being enrolled in dance classes. Now a historical part of the arts community in Chicago and recognized nationally. Brown appreciated the lessons she received; and

WHEREAS, she focused on her studies and earned a bachelor's degree from Roosevelt University and a master's degree in community organization and management from the University of Chicago; and

WHEREAS, her admiration for the arts remained even though she was surrounded by the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Arts Movement her relationship with the arts never took a backseat as she danced at local clubs to pay for college; and

WHEREAS, it wasn't until she took part in a play and joined Drama Incorporated which was organized in the late '50s that she would find her true calling and learn to do the whole business including acting, stage management, how to build sets, costuming, etc; and

WHEREAS, her travels to Africa, inspired by friends and peers, brought her full circle and made her realize the importance of sharing and preserving the Africa American story; and

WHEREAS, from there, Brown decided to create a destination for African Americans to not only tell their stories, but a place where they could acquire and develop skills that would strengthen the community culturally. She knew the Black theater wasn't anything new, but the lack of having one centralized space for Black artists to cultivate their talent and produce their own work was; and

WHEREAS, in 1971 her vision finally came to life when the eta Creative Arts Foundation was founded and moved into the facility in 1979. And has purchased nearby land for future expansion; and

WHEREAS, despite years of planning, she was unable to realize a major project - the construction of a new facility opposite eta's current home at 7558 S. South Chicago, that would contain expanded theater, studio and classroom space; and

WHEREAS, the art company has helped produce successful actors and is home to a library, art gallery, and a 200-seat theater, as well as a visual arts gallery that showcases artwork from various local and national artists, eta has produced over 180 productions, and has several training initiatives for adults and children, including acting, lighting, sound and many other programs. It also hosts a seven-week camp for children entitled, "Chicago On The Nile," and has brought forth new initiatives including poetry jams and Music Mondays with concentrations on cabaret and classical jazz; and

WHEREAS, Brown received an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from Chicago State University and was inducted into the Women's Hall of Fame of Chicago. She also received the Paul Roberson Award from the Chicago African American Arts Alliance and the Governor's Award in the Arts, as well as a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Joseph Jefferson Committee, and many other accolades. In addition, to a master's degree in community organization and management from the University of Chicago, Brown was the driving force behind the 1971 creation of the ETA Creative Arts Foundation, the only African American full-service cultural arts collective in the country. She is head of the only African American cultural institution in the world that has an endowment; and

WHEREAS, Dollar and Sense has also cited Brown as one of America's Top Business and Professional Women;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the Mayor and members of the City Council do hereby congratulate Abena Joan Brown for her longtime commitment to excellence; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a copy of this resolution be presented to Abena Joan Brown.

Leslie A. Hairston, Alderman, Fifth Ward

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