



Board of Commissioners of Cook County

118 North Clark Street
Chicago, IL

Legislation Details

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| Title: | PROPOSED RESOLUTION | | | | |

HONORING THE LIFE AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF HECKY POWELL

WHEREAS, on May 22, 2020, the City of Evanston lost a friend, activist, role model, father figure and mentor to many young people, philanthropist, restaurateur and unofficial “mayor” in Hecky Powell. Hecky never wanted to be called “Mr. Powell,” as he reserved that designation for his father, Forrest Powell; and

WHEREAS, Harry William Powell was born on November 6, 1948 at the then-Cook County Hospital in Chicago (now John H. Stroger Jr. Hospital). His mother Verna (Jenkins) Powell, a New Orleans native of Creole descent, was forced to deliver at Cook County because there was no room at the Community Hospital of Evanston, the only hospital in Evanston at that time that accepted black patients; and

WHEREAS, Hecky, one of nine siblings, inherited his name from his uncle. He had a wild streak as a teenager, which served him well in his later work as he mentored young people with similar tendencies. He earned a college degree at the University Without Walls, a nontraditional degree program at Northeastern Illinois, while working as a community organizer and social worker. He became the Executive Director at Neighbors at Work and created the Forrest E. Powell Foundation in 1994, a work-skills program for those without a college degree. He served as president of the Evanston branch of the N.A.A.C.P. He also served on the Evanston/Skokie District 65 School Board from 2001-2005, including a short stint as president of the Board. More recently Hecky was a member of the City of Evanston’s Economic Development Committee and the Mayor’s Employer Advisory Council; and

WHEREAS, Hecky met his wife, Cheryl Judice, a sociologist, while working together on community initiatives. In 1983, when the restaurant next to Hecky’s office came on the market, they bought it. Though neither knew anything about running a restaurant, his mother Verna did. She and Forrest dove into the business offering a full barbecue menu for takeout, delivery, and catering. Thus, “Hecky’s”, a beloved local institution, was born; and

WHEREAS, Kevin Pang, a food writer in Chicago, wrote that by having a restaurant in Evanston, Hecky introduced the wider world to South-side style barbecue, prepared in an aquarium smoker and slathered in sauce. From that restaurant, he served such notables as William “the Fridge” Perry, a Chicago Bears lineman; the Chicago Bulls, catering the team’s private plane at All-Star forward Scottie Pippin’s request; the Chicago Bears and Northwestern Wildcats, the entire Pasadena (CA) City Council following a lost Rose Bowl bet; and so many others in the community from high school students looking for help and Northwestern students who could not go home for Thanksgiving. He was the mainstay at Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky’s summer barbecue; and

WHEREAS, Hecky always attributed the success of his enterprise to the sauce. “It’s the sauce,” became the restaurant’s motto. Both the sauce and his spice packs, which now have nationwide distribution, were inspired by his mother’s Creole heritage and recipes. His ribs were prepared by first applying a dry rub, followed by 24-48 hours of grilling in the smoker, and finally slathered with his special sauce. In addition to providing excellent food, Hecky’s also provided the first job to many

young people in Evanston and supported many local youth sports teams; and

WHEREAS, never afraid to speak his mind, Hecky caused a dust-up when as a member of the District 65 School Board he questioned a survey that categorized biracial students as either black or white. "In American, we're all mutts," he said. "I'm a mutt." After weeks of political backlash, he added a Mutt Special to his menu (a combo platter of fried chicken, rib tips, and hot links). Hecky explained the name as an acronym for "Me Uttering the Truth." Hecky felt vindicated later when, in 2008, President-elect Obama declared himself a "mutt", too; and

WHEREAS, in a statement prepared by the Powell family, they wrote, "The outside world knew Hecky as a successful business owner and philanthropist in the Evanston community. However, we knew him best as the most generous and greatest father, husband, brother, son, cousin, friend and mentor anyone could ask for. We are so lucky and grateful to have had him in our lives and being the bedrock of our family."; and

WHEREAS, Hecky is survived by his wife Cheryl; his mother Verna; his children Sharmin, Terry, Dawn, Joy, Hecky Jr., Jason, and Gigi, as well as seven siblings; and

WHEREAS, the community celebrated Hecky with a parade of cars driving slowing past his home, saluting Ms. Judice with their horns as she sat in front of their brick home.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Commissioners of Cook County, on behalf of the 5.2 million residents of Cook County, honors the life and contributions of HECKY POWELL, and herewith expresses its sincere gratitude for the invaluable contributions he has made to the Citizens of Cook County, Illinois; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a suitable copy of this Resolution be spread upon the official proceedings of this Honorable Body and that an official copy of the same be tendered to the family of HECKY POWELL.

Sponsors: LARRY SUFFREDIN, TONI PRECKWINKLE (President), FRANK J. AGUILAR, ALMA E. ANAYA, LUIS ARROYO JR, SCOTT R. BRITTON, JOHN P. DALEY, DENNIS DEER, BRIDGET DEGNEN, BRIDGET GAINER, BRANDON JOHNSON, BILL LOWRY, DONNA MILLER, STANLEY MOORE, KEVIN B. MORRISON, SEAN M. MORRISON, PETER N. SILVESTRI, DEBORAH SIMS

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| Date | Ver. | Action By | Action | Result |
|-----------|------|------------------------|---------|--------|
| 6/18/2020 | 1 | Board of Commissioners | approve | Pass |