Legislation Details

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Title:	PROPOSED RESOLUTION		

COMMEMORATING THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF CHARLES BENTON

WHEREAS, Charles Benton, trusted advisor to three US Presidents, visionary film distributor, national and local philanthropist and assiduous advocate for public media and democracy died on April 29, 2015 leaving behind family, countless friends and a community profoundly enriched for having known him; and

WHEREAS, Charles Benton was a trusted advisor who served three Presidents of the United States. President Jimmy Carter appointed him to be the Chairman of the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science and as Chairman of the First White House Conference on Library and Information Services. President Bill Clinton appointed him to the Presidential Advisory Committee on the Public Interest Obligations of Digital Television Broadcasters. President Barack Obama appointed Benton to serve on the National Museum and Library Services Board, an advisory body that includes twenty presidentially appointed and Senate-confirmed members of the general public who have demonstrated expertise in, or commitment to, library or museum services; and

WHEREAS, Charles Benton began his long career in the media education and entertainment business shortly after graduating from Yale University. He joined Britannica Films, owned by his father. He served in various positions before leaving to teach 5th grade at Washington Elementary School in Evanston. After he rejoined the company as a salesman, he quickly became the company's top seller and later was Vice President of Marketing. During a realignment of various Britannica companies, he became the president of the newly formed Encyclopaedia Britannica Education Corporation; and

WHEREAS, Charles Benton created the nonprofit Fund for Media Research to study educational uses of new media. The U.S. Office of Education (now the Department of Education) hired the Fund to research the use of television in the sixteen largest U.S. school systems; and

WHEREAS, Charles Benton will long be remembered for his work with Public Media Inc., a distributor of public television programming, and Films Inc., a distributor of Hollywood movies and independent films, including the documentary "Hoop Dreams" to schools, libraries and prisons; and

WHEREAS, throughout his life, Charles Benton was a supporter of organizations that promoted the arts, education and communications. He served on the original Illinois Arts Council Board, the Illinois Humanities Council and The Partnership for a Connected Illinois. He was a trustee of the University of Chicago, Hampton Institute, and National College of Education. He was a member of the founding board of the American Film Institute and the Chicago International Film Festival, served on the board of WTTW, and was President of the National Citizen Committee for Broadcasting. He was elected a Field Museum Trustee and later became a Life Trustee; and

WHEREAS, Charles Benton and his wife Marjorie shared their commitment to social justice issues very early with their children, Adrianne, Craig and Scott and in so doing created a family legacy of community service. The Bentons were prominent and treasured members of the Evanston Unitarian Church. Through the Church they participated in the grassroots movements of the `50s and `60s.

They and their children marched for civil rights, open housing and desegregated schools, against the war in Vietnam, and for disarmament; and

WHEREAS, Charles and Marjorie Benton initiated and provided the $200,000 grant that the League of Women Voters used to fund the televised presidential forums during the 1976 primaries. Those forums led to the televised presidential debates sponsored by the League later in 1976. It was the first such event since the Nixon-Kennedy debates of 1960; and

WHEREAS, Charles Benton has also been honored with many awards including: the Golden Hugo Award from the Chicago International Film Festival; the Chicagoland Educational Film Festival Leonard Slatkin Humanitarian Award; the Manship Prize from the University of Louisiana; the Distinguished Grantmaker of the Year award from the Council on Foundations; the Susan G. Hadden Pioneer Award from the Alliance for Public Technology; the Broadband Lifetime Achievement Award from the Partnership for a Connected Illinois; the Everett C. Parker Award from the United Church of Christ Office of Communication, Inc and he was a Hyde Park Arts Center Honoree; and

WHEREAS, Charles Benton founded the Benton Foundation as the legacy of his father, William, a public servant, later United States Senator who championed free speech and civil liberties. The Benton Foundation continues to work to close the digital divide by advocating access to high-speed Internet to people in poor or remote places. Over the years, the foundation has been a catalyst for increasing broadband deployment and adoption, particularly for America's most vulnerable populations; and

WHEREAS, the impact felt by the loss of Charles Benton is significant. In the words of the great American journalist Bill Moyers, "The world feels emptier today, like the forest when a great oak falls. And those of us whose lives were touched by Charles are a little lonelier knowing he is gone. What an enthusiast he was for things that mattered to democracy and humanity." His loss will be felt even more acutely by his wife of over sixty-two years, Marjorie, their daughter Adrianne Furniss and her husband, Robert; son, Craig, and his wife Tina Ashmore; his five treasured grandchildren, Savannah Taylor, Colby Benton, Hemingway Benton, Carrie Furniss, and Lily Furniss; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Board of Commissioners of Cook County that the Board on behalf of the nearly the 5.2 million residents of Cook County takes great pleasure in commemorating the extraordinary life of Charles Benton, and herewith expresses its sincere gratitude for the invaluable contributions he has made to the Citizens of Cook County, Illinois;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this text be spread upon the official proceedings of this Honorable Body and a suitable copy of same be tendered to the family of Charles Benton, that his memory may be so honored.

Sponsors: LARRY SUFFREDIN

Indexes:

Code sections:

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Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
5/20/2015	1	Board of Commissioners	approve	Pass

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