

Senate Resolution No. 273

BY: Senator BORRELLO

COMMEMORATING the 100th Anniversary of The Reg Lenna Center for the Arts of Jamestown, New York, on February 5, 2023

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to honor and pay tribute to those cultural institutions and organizations whose commitment to promoting the richness and diversity of the arts and entertainment world has contributed to the strength, vitality, and cultural enrichment of their communities and the great State of New York; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is justly proud to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of The Reg Lenna Center for the Arts, to be celebrated on Sunday, February 5, 2023; and

WHEREAS, The Reg Lenna Center for the Arts of Jamestown, New York, first opened its doors to the public on February 5, 1923, as The Palace Theatre; in its first three years, the theater would typically show short comedy and feature films both before and after its twice-daily vaudevillian performances; and

WHEREAS, In 1926, The Palace Theatre and its facility was purchased by businessman Nikitas Dipson, who continued its usual programming of film and vaudeville shows until he secured a 20-year lease making The Palace a Warner Brothers theater; and

WHEREAS, Once the lease with Warner Brothers was concluded in 1950, Nikitas Dipson, now doing business as Dipson Theatres, once again took over management of The Palace; soon after, an extensive remodel to the facility took place, which saw the installation of new heating and cooling systems, carpeting, wall coverings, and new seats; and

WHEREAS, One of The Palace's finest moments came in 1956, when it hosted the world premiere of "Forever, Darling," starring Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball; the comedy couple visited Jamestown, Lucille's birthplace, to attend the screening, drawing thousands of adoring fans downtown and to the theater to welcome the Hollywood stars in their Western New York visit; and

WHEREAS, In the following decades, the theater experienced a decline in attendance and deterioration to its equipment and building itself; by the dawn of the 1980s, The Palace was in a state of dilapidation and in dire need of repairs; and

WHEREAS, A special concert was arranged by Phillip Morris, executive director of the Chautauqua County Arts Council, who contacted his friend Harry Chapin about doing a performance in Jamestown to raise awareness about the current condition of The Palace; and

WHEREAS, In June of 1981, The Palace featured Harry Chapin in concert, the first live performance show to be held in the theater in 25 years; sparked by the singer's interest, a group of citizens, with the help of the Jamestown Urban Renewal Agency and the Gebbie Foundation, banded together to repair and clean up the theater; after a positive response, the theater was ready to re-open by October of 1982; and

WHEREAS, In February of 1987, the \$3.35 million Palace Civic Center capital campaign was started to completely renovate the old Palace; The Reginald and Elizabeth Lenna Foundation made an early donation of \$1 million and by fall the campaign had exceeded its goal by raising \$3.5 million; in the following year, The Palace was officially renamed The Reg Lenna Civic Center; and

WHEREAS, The beautifully restored, 1,269-seat Reg Lenna Civic Center held its grand reopening on October 12, 1990, and soon after, received a League of Historic American Theatres award for the quality and workmanship of its restoration; and

WHEREAS, For several years, The Reg operated side by side with Arts Council for Chautauqua County, spearheaded by Executive Director Phillip Morris; both organizations saw significant growth with property acquisitions and management, Arts In Education programs with Jamestown Public Schools, the Wright Gallery and Palace Gallery, the start of Infinity Performing Arts and The Lucy-Desi Museum and Center for Comedy (and the Lucille Ball Comedy Festival) and mainstage productions from several area art groups; during this period, film enthusiast Paul Schmidt programmed a film series featuring current, critically-acclaimed movies; and

WHEREAS, Through the early 2000s, The Arts Council and The Reg Lenna Civic Center continued their partnership, while Infinity and the Lucy-Desi Center branched off into their own separate endeavors; during this time The Reg welcomed David Schein as its new Executive Director, and under his luminous leadership The Reg became more involved with the community and engaged new prospective collaborators in the way of arts education; and

WHEREAS, In 2004, Dennis Drew, a founding member of 10,000 Maniacs and Jamestown native, founded community radio station WRFA-LP 107.9 FM, which was followed by the public opening of the 3rd on 3rd Gallery in 2011, which featured the first "All Decks on Hand" skateboard art show; and

WHEREAS, In 2013, The Reg Lenna Center for the Arts was formed, and was led by Executive Director Kathleen Eads; and

WHEREAS, The Reg's first season was highlighted by a September performance of 10,000 Maniacs in recognition of the 10th anniversary of WRFA, and the following month, Harry Chapin's brothers, along with his bandmates, nephews, and nieces, performed a live concert titled "Harry Chapin: A Family Celebration", fulfilling the late singer's promise to return to the restored Palace Theatre; and

WHEREAS, In 2015, staff and board of The Reg, along with regional foundation representatives, Jamestown city officials, and community members, joined with an architectural firm to conceptualize a complete overhaul of The Reg's lobby, box office, and surrounding buildings to fully realize the potential of the block as a focus for community arts involvement; The Reg was awarded Downtown Revitalization Initiative funding matched by support from the local Gebbie, Sheldon and Lenna foundations to realize the plans; and

WHEREAS, In December 2017, construction began on the master plan to move 3rd on 3rd Gallery to street level, create new offices, remodel and update WRFA studios and offices, and create a community media arts studio, and a new digital marquee was installed, taking the place of the existing milk glass; however, the classic profile of the marquee, including neon and running lights remains; and

WHEREAS, In August of 2018, the new lobby, box office, concession stand, and a street level 3rd on 3rd Gallery, were opened to the public along with new sidewalks embedded with a snow melt system; construction on the master plan to renovate all of The Reg's facilities was completed in December of 2018; and

WHEREAS, A vibrant arts community encourages collaboration, instills local pride, draws people together, and is essential to a community's vitality; since its inception, The Reg Lenna Center for the Arts has greatly contributed to the richness of New York's cultural palette and remains steadfastly dedicated to ensuring this gem remains in all its glory for decades to come; and

WHEREAS, The arts are the building blocks of civilization; they are central to human expression; they enlighten us and inspire the imagination; educational institutions, individuals, and organizations which further such worthy purposes richly merit the recognition and appreciation of this Legislative Body and the people of the State of New York; and

WHEREAS, Under the luminous leadership of Executive Director Hillary Meyer, The Reg Lenna Center for the Arts looks back with great pride to its beginnings, viewing, with just satisfaction, its successful evolution, it renews both its dedication to supporting artistic excellence, and its commitment to the community it has been built within beginning in 1923, expressing its appreciation to all those who have helped to sustain and enhance it over the years; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of The Reg Lenna Center for the Arts in the City of Jamestown, New York; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to Hillary Meyer, Executive Director, The Reg Lenna Center for the Arts.