

BY: Senator COONEY

CELEBRATING the life of Betty Strassenburgh, longtime Rochester philanthropist and activist, distinguished citizen, and devoted member of her community

WHEREAS, It is with profound sorrow that this Legislative Body, representing the people of the State of New York, is moved this day to pay tribute to an eminent woman of indomitable dedication whose public service and countless accomplishments will forever stand as a paradigm and inspiration for others; and

WHEREAS, Betty Strassenburgh of Rochester, New York, has died at the age of 90; and

WHEREAS, Betty Strassenburgh was a philanthropist, harpist, sailor, pilot, adventurer, but most of all, she was a community advocate who, among other efforts, helped lead a campaign to renovate the Eastman Theatre; and

WHEREAS, Born in New York City, where she attended high school, Betty Strassenburgh played the harp and was accepted to the Eastman School of Music, which brought her to Rochester; and

WHEREAS, She taught harp at Nazareth Academy after she graduated from Eastman in 1952, and she remained close to the Eastman School throughout her life, later moving to Grove Street where she could see the theater from her dining room window; and

WHEREAS, Betty Strassenburgh and her late husband, Robert, president of Strassenburgh Laboratories and son of the local Strassenburgh Planetarium donors, made their home in Pittsford, New York; and

WHEREAS, She played an active role on the boards of East End-based cultural groups such as the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra and Garth Fagan Dance; and

WHEREAS, A strong supporter of the arts in Rochester, Betty Strassenburgh moved to the East End in 1997, and was actively involved with the renovation of Kodak Hall at Eastman Theatre, a project that included a new building for teaching, rehearsal, and performing spaces; and

WHEREAS, It was her neighbor and friend on Grove Street, architect Bob Macon, who got her involved in the renovations; he was ill from cancer and his wife entrusted the plans for renovation with Betty to complete his vision; she also helped raise the money to make Macon's vision of hanging a Dale Chihuly glass sculpture in the new atrium a reality; and

WHEREAS, On the WXXI program Norm & Company in 2017, Betty recalls

the effort to bring the Eastman Theatre project forward was not an easy process; it took approximately 10 years because there were all sorts of ideas of how the cultural center should be and how the performing arts center should be; there were so many different people that had their own ideas; and

WHEREAS, In addition to her involvement in the arts, Betty Strassenburgh was dedicated to helping advance women's leadership opportunities in Rochester; she realized that having control over her finances gave her more choices in life; and

WHEREAS, Betty Strassenburgh was employed with the investment firm of Howe & Rustling to bring in prospective clients; she began to understand how few women handled money and understood finances, so she became a founding member of the Women's Fund and Rochester Women's Network; and

WHEREAS, She also realized few women served on corporate boards, and during her appearance on Norm & Company, she described how she joined Catherine Carlson on a visit to the CEO of Bausch & Lomb to push for representation on the company's board; after explaining to him what she was doing, the CEO put a woman on the board; and

WHEREAS, Betty Strassenburgh's life was not all work, it involved a lot of fun and adventuring as well; she got into sailing as an activity she and her first husband could do together; she crewed for a local accomplished female sailor, Helen Ingerson, who won the top prize for women's sailing when Betty was on her crew in the 1960s; and

WHEREAS, When Betty married Robert Strassenburgh, it began a 25-year adventure of cruising around the world; she visited all seven continents, including a trip to Antarctica; and

WHEREAS, Betty Strassenburgh also became a licensed pilot, learning to fly on a four-seat Beechcraft Deonair plane; her adventures included a crash with her flight instructor on board; they clipped treetops and flipped into a farm field in Sparta, Livingston County, but they were able to walk away from the accident; she also survived a boat fire on the Hudson River, as well as breast cancer; and

WHEREAS, Betty Strassenburgh was deeply devoted to supporting the arts, including the Gateways Music Festival, which encourages African American musicians to perform classical music; the festival is now affiliated with the Eastman School of Music; and

WHEREAS, Over the years, Betty Strassenburgh had a lifelong devotion to issues related to racial justice, and issues related to diversity; and

WHEREAS, In 2019, she was honored by WXXI with the President's Award, which honors an individual who exemplifies the spirit of collaboration toward the WXXI mission, makes a contribution to WXXI programming, and demonstrates exceptional commitment, creativity, and leadership; Betty Strassenburgh was one such individual; and

WHEREAS, She has been a strong advocate for public media in Rochester and its mission to serve the community; because of her long-time generous support, WXXI announced at that event that it would name the radio wing of the WXXI building "The Betty Strassenburgh Studios"; and

WHEREAS, A true gem in Rochester, Betty Strassenburgh was always willing to lend a hand to help lift up her community and its residents; and

WHEREAS, Betty Strassenburgh, who displayed many unique qualities, lived an immensely beautiful life built on compassion, kindness, and respect for others; she will be truly missed by all those who had the privilege and honor of knowing her, especially her longtime partner, Gene Van Voorhis; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to celebrate the life of Betty Strassenburgh, and to express its deepest condolences to her family; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the family of Betty Strassenburgh.