Assembly Resolution No. 928

BY: M. of A. Brabenec

COMMEMORATING the 100th Anniversary of the Lafayette Theater of Suffern, New York

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 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 Lafayette Theater on March 3, 2024; and

WHEREAS, The Lafayette Theater of Suffern, New York, in Rockland County, is at the heart of the Suffern community; it opened its doors on March 3, 1924, at the height of silent film popularity, and thrived with live vaudeville shows and film presentations; and

WHEREAS, Inspired by the Italian and French Renaissance, the 942-seat Lafayette Theater is a product of the renowned Eugene DeRosa, who also designed such famed theaters as the Apollo and Broadway Theater; the marvelous theater includes rows of columns, opera booths, red velvet drapery, a crystal chandelier, and other fancy flourishes, such as its famed antique Wurlitzer organ; and

WHEREAS, In 1953, the Lafayette Theater installed equipment to handle 3-D films, and became the first theatre in Rockland County to show movies in wide-screen Cinema Scope with stereophonic sound; and

WHEREAS, The Lafayette Theater, in partnering with Good Samaritan Hospital, received renovations in the 1980s, which refurbished the stage, and brought about new carpeting and lighting; in 1990, the New York Theater Organ Society arranged with then-owner Al Venturini, to install a pipe organ known as the Ben Hall Memorial Mighty Wurlitzer into the long-empty organ chamber, a sparkling piece of theater history cherished by residents of the area and far beyond; and

WHEREAS, After a period of adversity and closing briefly, Robert Benmosche, a resident of Suffern and the CEO of MetLife Insurance, saw the potential of the theatre and its importance to downtown Suffern; he purchased the property and made repairs to the roof and the exterior of the theatre to prevent further damage to the building; and

WHEREAS, In 2002, Robert Benmosche leased the theatre to the Galaxy Theatre Corporation under the leadership of Nelson Page; he and the Benmosches made extensive renovations to the interior of the theatre including restoring the ornate ceiling, and installing a new chandelier to replace the one removed during the 1930's; Nelson Page also arranged to have new projection and sound systems installed, an act of these

esteemed men which serves as a testament to the value of investing and preserving the arts; and

WHEREAS, In August of 2013, the operation of the Lafayette Theater was turned over to JACA Entertainment Corporation, a company headed by Ari Benmosche, the son of former owner, Robert Benmosche; and

WHEREAS, Due to the efforts of such dedicated individuals such as owners, patrons, donors, and dedicated theater attendees over the years, the Lafayette Theater remains open after a remarkable century of artistic productions and service to the Suffern community, State, and Nation at large; and

WHEREAS, A group of Suffern residents formed the Lafayette Association to Save the Theater (LAST) with the goal of keeping the historic structure from being carved into a seven-screen multiplex; their dedication and commitment to the cause proved successful with the original theater style being preserved for years to come; and

WHEREAS, The Lafayette Theater continues to delight audiences with film festivals, live performances by local artists, and weekly performances on its New York Theater Organ Society Ben Hall Wurlitzer Organ; and

WHEREAS, As the Historic Lafayette Theatre 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 and has served since 1924, 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 Lafayette Theater of Suffern, New York; and be it further

RESOLVED, That copies of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the Lafayette Theater.