

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Sarah Ophelia Colley Cannon, fondly remembered as "Minnie Pearl".

WHEREAS, it was with great sadness and a profound sense of loss that the members of this General Assembly and the citizens of our state learned of the death of Ms. Sarah Ophelia Colley Cannon, fondly remembered as "Minnie Pearl"; and

WHEREAS, on March 3, 1996, the Grand Ole Opry, the music industry, the Nashville community and all of Tennessee lost forever one of the most talented and invigorating performers and dedicated philanthropists in our nation's history; and

WHEREAS, as "Minnie Pearl" with her best gingham dress, black patent leather shoes, cotton stockings and a \$1.98 straw hat, Ms. Cannon entertained millions; for more than fifty years she greeted large audiences with her best aimin'-to-please smile and vociferous "HOW-Dee"; and

WHEREAS, Sarah Colley Cannon began her life in Centerville, Tennessee, the youngest daughter of the Colley family; as a young lady, she left Centerville to move to Nashville and attend Ward-Belmont finishing school; and

WHEREAS, after receiving her drama degree from Ward-Belmont in 1932, Ms. Cannon became a member of the Wayne P. Sewell Producing Company, a theatrical group that toured the southern states performing for local clubs and civic organizations; and

WHEREAS, while performing in the mountains of northeastern Alabama in the winter of 1936, Ms. Cannon boarded with a mountain lady and her family; the family's rustic stories and folk expressions delighted and inspired Sarah Cannon, and upon deciding to incorporate them into her routine, "Minnie Pearl" was born; and

WHEREAS, "Minnie Pearl" became a star in her own right during the 1940s; promoted by Nashville radio station WSM, "Minnie" went on the road with superstar Roy Acuff and traveled with Pee Wee King's Golden West Cowboys troupe, performing for servicemen during World War II; and

WHEREAS, "Minnie" joined the cast of the Opry's weekly television show in 1942, entertaining the entire nation with her numerous off-key renditions of songs and her jokes about her fictitious home town of Grinder's Switch; and

WHEREAS, in addition to her genius as a comedian and entertainer, "Minnie" was the Opry's goodwill ambassador and the country music industry's spokesperson; she was also a mother figure and mentor to a great number of young Opry stars; and

WHEREAS, "Minnie" had a positive and clean sense of humor that appealed to everyone and stood the test of time; by the 1950s she was a television network regular, appearing on the TV shows of Jack Parr, Tennessee Ernie Ford, Jimmy Dean, Ralph Edwards, and Dinah Shore; and

WHEREAS, as her popularity soared, the demand for her recordings did too, and in the 1960s she recorded her routines and novelty songs for several major record labels; and

WHEREAS, "Minnie Pearl" was one of the nation's favorite characters from the 1970s hit television series, Hee Haw, the most successful syndicated television series in history, and in the 1980s, she was a regular on TNN's Nashville Now with her segment entitled "Let Minnie Pearl Steal Your Joke"; and

WHEREAS, "Minnie Pearl" ventured into other businesses outside of her life on stage; she franchised Minnie Pearl's Chicken restaurants, published her autobiography and opened her own Music Row museum; and

WHEREAS, Sarah Cannon was the distinguished recipient of a number of industry awards for "Minnie" of which even a brief list is inspiring; in 1966 she became the first woman to

win Billboard's "Man of the Year" Award for country music, and in 1975 she was inducted in the Country Music Hall of Fame; and

WHEREAS, in 1992, Ms. Cannon was awarded a National Medal of Arts by President George Bush and, in 1994, she became the first woman inducted into the Comedy Hall of Fame; and

WHEREAS, "Minnie Pearl" continued to star on stage and television throughout the 1980s, including appearing with the biggest comedy stars in the world on Comic Relief, a telecast which raised money for the nation's homeless; and

WHEREAS, Sarah Cannon always gave generously of her time, money and talents to help others during her illustrious career; throughout Nashville, our great state and nation, Sarah Cannon was known for her social conscience and good works; and

WHEREAS, she was a treasured member and volunteer for many worthy organizations, including the United Way, Outlook Nashville, Big Brothers, the E.A.R. Foundation, the March of Dimes, the Vanderbilt Children's Hospital, the Bill Wilkerson Speech and Hearing Center, the Nashville Humane Association, and the W.O. Smith Community Music School; and

WHEREAS, perhaps Ms. Cannon will best be remembered for her extensive work with the American Cancer Society; Ms. Cannon was herself a cancer survivor and had watched her sister succumb to the disease, fueling her passion for cancer prevention and education; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Cannon gave unreservedly of herself to the Society by volunteering in hospitals, co-chairing the 1972-1973 national fundraising campaign, and chairing the Nashville-Davidson County district's crusade; and

WHEREAS, in recognition of her extraordinary humanitarian efforts, Sara Cannon was awarded the Roy Acuff Award by the Country Music Federation and The Tennessean in 1987, the American Cancer Society's annual Courage Award in that same year and the Outstanding Nashvillian Award in 1991; and

WHEREAS, in January 1991, Centennial Medical Center in Nashville renamed their cancer center in honor of this great lady and her many contributions to the hospital and the community; and

WHEREAS, for 49 years, Sarah Cannon enjoyed the loving companionship and unyielding support of her husband, Henry Cannon; and

WHEREAS, the legacy Sarah Collie Cannon leaves behind will be remembered and treasured by family, fellow celebrities, fans and friends for many years to come; and

WHEREAS, it is appropriate that this legislative body pause in its deliberations to remember the exemplary life of this fine Tennessean; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE NINETY-NINTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, That we honor the memory of Sarah Ophelia Colley Cannon, remembering with great admiration her incredible talent, exemplary character and many selfless contributions to the community, our state and nation.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That we express our deepest sympathy to Ms. Cannon's husband, Henry, other family members and her many friends.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.

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