

2023-K2289

Assembly Resolution No. 2289

BY: M. of A. Barrett

CELEBRATING the life of Joan Kaplan Davidson, preservationist and philanthropist who devoted her life to the betterment of New York State and the Hudson River Valley and to improving quality of life for all New Yorkers

WHEREAS, It is the custom of this Legislative Body to pay tribute to citizens of the State of New York whose lifework and civic endeavor served to enhance the quality of life in their communities and this great Empire State; and

WHEREAS, Joan Kaplan Davidson of Germantown, New York, who long worked to support and advance efforts to protect New York State's natural and built environments in both urban and rural settings, to champion the arts, and to fight for civil liberties and social justice, died on Friday, August 11, 2023, at the age of 96; and

WHEREAS, Born in New York City on May 26, 1927, Joan Kaplan Davidson was a tireless advocate for the built and natural landmarks that are essential to the cultural history of New York and was a devoted public servant of New York State, serving as both the Chair of the Council on the Arts from 1975 to 1977, and the New York State Parks Commissioner from 1993 to 1995; and

WHEREAS, Joan Kaplan Davidson earned a bachelor's degree from

Cornell University and a postgraduate degree in education from the Bank Street School and began her public service career in Washington, D.C., where she worked on the staff of the Senate Armed Services Preparedness Committee under Senate Majority Leader Lyndon B. Johnson; and

WHEREAS, Joan Kaplan Davidson created and served as the first President of Westbeth Artists Housing in lower Manhattan, one of the first adaptive reuse initiatives dedicated to providing affordable housing and workspace for artists and arts organizations, which would become a model for the rehabilitation of industrial buildings; and

WHEREAS, Succeeding her father, Joan Kaplan Davidson served as President of the J.M. Kaplan Fund from 1977 to 1993, spearheading the fund's efforts on behalf of the environment, preservation, civil liberties, and the arts, establishing her legacy as a philanthropist and preservationist through actions, such as the fight to preserve Broadway theaters, the restoration of the Eldridge Street Synagogue, and the groundwork and provision of much of the funding for the Gracie Mansion Conservancy which renovated and preserved the New York City Mayor's residence; and

WHEREAS, A lifelong conservationist, Joan Kaplan Davidson established programs to support the protection of New York State's natural resources and the preservation of rural communities, such as the Rural New York Grant Program and the Industrial Heritage Reuse Project, and was especially active in the Hudson Valley where she resided; and

WHEREAS, In 1995, Joan Kaplan Davidson founded Furthermore, an organization with a mission to provide grants for the publication of nonfiction books related to the arts, history, and the natural and man-made environment, and has assisted with the publication of more than 1,400 books, utilizing more than \$8 million in grants; and

WHEREAS, In 1996, Joan Kaplan Davidson was one of the founding members of Historic Hudson, a preservation organization dedicated to protecting the quality of life and the cultural and architectural heritage of the city of Hudson; and

WHEREAS, Under Joan Kaplan Davidson's stewardship, Midwood, her 19th-century estate on the Hudson River, became the center of cultural, social, and political discourse and activism in the region; her graciousness in hosting gatherings, large and small, throughout the year was a personal contribution to her community and beyond; and

WHEREAS, In her work to protect the Hudson River and the Hudson River Valley, Joan Kaplan Davidson and the J.M. Kaplan Fund provided grants to myriad important organizations, including: Adirondack Experience, Adirondack Wild, Hudson Hall, Scenic Hudson, Historic Hudson, the Fisher Center at Bard College, the Thomas Cole Historic House, the Shaker Museum and Library, and the Columbia Land Conservancy; and

WHEREAS, Joan Kaplan Davidson, who served as chair of the Hudson-Fulton-Champlain Quadricentennial Commission, was personally committed to the protection of the Hudson River and the Hudson River Valley, and would often be found deeply immersed in efforts to clean the river, preserve its scenic banks, and protect endangered species of fish; and

WHEREAS, Joan Kaplan Davidson is survived by her children, John Matthew, G. Bradford, Peter W., and Betsy; her twelve grandchildren; and her five great-grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, Imbued with generational foresight and a deep well of compassion, Joan Kaplan Davidson leaves behind an extraordinary legacy,

which will long endure the passage of time and remain enshrined for generations in the historic buildings and natural landscape that she helped to renew and preserve; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to celebrate the well-lived life of Joan Kaplan Davidson and to express its deepest condolences to her family and friends; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the family of Joan Kaplan Davidson.