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HOUSE RESOLUTION

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WHEREAS, The members of the Illinois House of Representatives wish to honor Dr. William Freeberg for his work to develop recreation programs for children and adults with disabilities, including the Special Olympics, as well as to recognize the 50th anniversary of the Special Olympics, the largest sports program for athletes with disabilities in the world; and

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WHEREAS, In 1950, Dr. Freeberg was appointed by Delyte Morris, the President of Southern Illinois University (SIU), to study an area near Giant City State Park to determine if it was feasible to establish an outdoor education area and learning laboratory; and

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WHEREAS, By this time, Dr. Freeberg had earned the first doctorate in recreation from Indiana University, served on the SIU faculty, and coached the football and gymnastics teams at SIU; by 1952, he would establish the recreation and outdoor education curriculum at SIU; and

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WHEREAS, Based on Dr. Freeberg's recommendation, the university purchased 120 acres in the area of Little Grassy Lake Recreational Area that would become the site for university educational programs involving five of SIU's

1 colleges and the site for the first summer camp for children  
2 with disabilities; Dr. Freeberg and President Morris were so  
3 clear on their mission that people joked about the two that  
4 they could "stare into a muddy stream and see the bottom"; and

5 WHEREAS, In 1954, Dr. Freeberg, Bill Howe, and Judge Peyton  
6 Kunce established the Egyptian Association for the Mentally  
7 Retarded which led Dr. Freeberg to develop a summer camp  
8 program for the disabled in an abandoned farmhouse surrounded  
9 by leftover equipment from World War II such as pup tents, and  
10 manned by area students from Dr. Freeberg's classes; this area  
11 ultimately became known as "Touch of Nature", with five fully  
12 operational camps through Dr. Freeberg's leadership; and

13 WHEREAS, Since 1954, Touch of Nature has provided countless  
14 students with the opportunity to grow, learn, and train in an  
15 outdoor setting in 55 educational programs such as forestry,  
16 recreation, special education, early education, chemistry,  
17 biology, agriculture, conservation, environmental science,  
18 physical education, and rehabilitation; thousands of students  
19 have been mentored in these programs over the last 60 years;  
20 and

21 WHEREAS, By 1963, SIU offered the first "Institute for  
22 Directors and Staff of Day Camps for Mentally Retarded  
23 Children" with the Joseph Kennedy Foundation for people across

1 the country to learn about programming for children with  
2 disabilities at the camps; this was the first such training to  
3 be offered across the country; Mrs. Eunice Kennedy Shriver  
4 attended this training; she had started a program in her  
5 backyard the previous year for 35 campers called Camp Shriver  
6 and had a passion for helping those with disabilities; and

7 WHEREAS, Eunice Shriver asked Dr. Freeberg to join a select  
8 group to help develop a program of recreation for people with  
9 intellectual disabilities; on October 21, 1964, President  
10 Morris received a telegram from Sargent Shriver that asked SIU  
11 to lend Dr. Freeberg to them full-time for three months to  
12 coordinate with the Kennedy Foundation's nationwide recreation  
13 program; the telegram closed with "Dr. Freeberg is the only man  
14 in the country with sufficient grasp and knowledge of the  
15 problem to carry out this most important and vital program";  
16 and

17 WHEREAS, In 1965, the Kennedy Foundation sent a team of  
18 observers to evaluate SIU's summer camp program; Dr. Freeberg  
19 reported that "The pilot operation at SIU could lay groundwork  
20 for a national sports program for the mentally retarded. The  
21 Foundation is considering competitive games between its  
22 various camps"; by that time, children with disabilities had  
23 been attending camping programs at Little Grassy for 13 years;  
24 studies of those programs and others led Dr. Freeberg, Sargent

1 Shriver, and others to see the great benefits from expanding  
2 the limited opportunities that existed; and

3 WHEREAS, Anne McGlone Burke attended the training and  
4 returned to her Chicago Park District office where she  
5 developed an idea for a city-wide track meet for the disabled;  
6 teams throughout the city began to practice for events; working  
7 closely with Dr. Freeberg, Anne Burke developed the event; Dr.  
8 Freeberg persuaded the Kennedy Foundation to sponsor the  
9 program and obtained permission from the International Olympic  
10 Committee to use the name; and

11 WHEREAS, On July 20, 1968, the first Special Olympics was  
12 held in Chicago's Soldier Field with 1,000 athletes from 26  
13 states and Canada; dignitaries attending the event included  
14 Mayor Daley, the Shriviers, Blackhawk Stan Mikita, Olympic  
15 Medalist Rafer Johnson, astronaut James Lovell, Governor  
16 Shapiro, organizer Anne Burke, and Dr. Freeberg; therefore, be  
17 it

18 RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE  
19 HUNDREDTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that we  
20 recognize the 50th anniversary of the Special Olympics, and the  
21 vital role that Illinois, Southern Illinois University, and Dr.  
22 William "Freebie" Freeberg had in the purchasing, planning, and  
23 promotion of the Touch of Nature Camp, the mentoring of

1 thousands of students, and the services of five million  
2 athletes and their families who have benefited; and be it  
3 further

4       RESOLVED, That suitable copies of this resolution be  
5 presented to the family of Dr. Freeberg, the Director of Touch  
6 of Nature, and the President of Southern Illinois University as  
7 a symbol of our esteem and respect.