

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 71

*Commending the Richlands Area Citizens for the Arts.*

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, January 26, 2026  
Agreed to by the Senate, January 29, 2026

WHEREAS, for 44 years, the Richlands Area Citizens for the Arts promoted arts education and enriched cultural life in Southwest Virginia by organizing a wide range of arts programs and local performances in the Town of Richlands and throughout Tazewell County; and

WHEREAS, originally known as Community Artist Residency Training (CART), the Richlands Area Citizens for the Arts was established in 1981 by a group of local residents led by Mary Lawson, who sought to attract artists and musicians to the region, bringing new opportunities for education and entertainment to their children, families, and neighbors; and

WHEREAS, while the organization subsequently adopted its current name, the Richlands Area Citizens for the Arts, to reflect its expanded mission, it continued to be best known as CART; and

WHEREAS, in its early days, CART brought a musician to the area for a residency of several weeks and hosted public performances in local libraries, stores, and other venues to give every member of the community an opportunity to enjoy the performing arts; and

WHEREAS, in 1988, CART hired Ginger H. Branton as secretary and arts-in-education coordinator; she was ultimately promoted to executive director and garnered a reputation as an incomparable champion of the arts in Southwest Virginia whose visionary leadership helped CART achieve new heights; and

WHEREAS, CART hosted exhibitions celebrating art from around the world, welcomed musical acts like Chet Atkins, Louise Mandrell, and Burl Ives, and organized performances of well-known theatre productions, such as *Man of La Mancha* and *Babes in Toyland*; and

WHEREAS, CART provided arts-in-education programming at schools throughout Tazewell County, helping students build a strong foundation for a lifelong appreciation of the arts and encouraging many young people to pursue further education and careers in the arts; and

WHEREAS, for its final season in 2025, CART commissioned a documentary film on the creation of a community mural that celebrates the history and heritage of Richlands and hosted the "New Squid on the Block" puppet show by the Barefoot Puppet Theater; and

WHEREAS, CART fulfilled its mission through grants from the Virginia Commission for the Arts, local governments, and various foundations and with generous support from businesses, families, and other patrons of the arts; and

WHEREAS, over the course of the organization's 44-year history, the hardworking staff members and volunteers of CART not only touched the lives of countless young people through its educational programs, but also gave all members of the community unique opportunities to better understand and engage with the arts on a personal level; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend the Richlands Area Citizens for the Arts for its legacy of excellence in support of the arts and transformational contributions to cultural life in Southwest Virginia; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to Ginger Branton, executive director, and Elaine Holmes, president, of the Richlands Area Citizens for the Arts as an expression of the General Assembly's admiration for the group's exceptional achievements as one of the region's premier arts organizations.

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