



City of Pittsburgh

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Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Text File

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Committee: City Council

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WHEREAS raised from a young age in Pittsburgh's Hill District by his parents J.D. and Lilly Penny, Robert Lee Penny was a writer and playwright whose plays have been produced all over the country. His works, including more than 300 poems and 30 plays, exemplified African American cultural experience in working-class Pittsburgh; and

WHEREAS influenced by social activists such as Amiri Baraka, Rob believed that his art should portray his strong beliefs against social injustice and racial discrimination. In 1968, Rob, along with fellow Pittsburgh playwright August Wilson, co-founded the Black Horizon Theatre in the Hill District, where performances were held until the 1970s. Rob was also the playwright-in-residence for the Kuntu Repertory Theatre, which was founded by his colleague Vernell Lillie. Today the theatre, still run by Dr. Lillie, continues to hold performances of Rob's plays; and

WHEREAS Rob Penny actively served as an Associate Professor at the University of Pittsburgh starting in 1969. Also known as "Brother Oba", a Swahili term for king, Rob was a much beloved teacher who helped black students to embrace their African heritage; and

WHEREAS as a founding member of the Black Studies Department at the University of Pittsburgh, now known as the Africana Studies Department, he acted as chair from 1978-1984. As well as being an inspiration to his students in writing and Africana Studies, his inspirations stretched beyond the classroom to encourage social activism and community involvement; and

WHEREAS Rob Penny's family includes his wife of 43 years, Betty Penny; three sons: Johnny, Robert Lee Jr., and Kadumu; and two sisters: Ann Penny and Betty Jean Penny; and

WHEREAS with the combination of talents as a writer, teacher, and social activist, Rob Penny was truly an inspiration to many throughout his life. Although Rob passed away in 2003, his work and his strong beliefs continue to encourage others to make a difference in their communities.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Council of the City of Pittsburgh does hereby wish to honor Mr. Robert Penny by presenting the Penny Family with a key to the City of Pittsburgh for his commitment to social activism, dedication to encouraging youth, and contributions to the greater Hill District community and declaring today, July 29, 2008, Robert Penny Day in the City of Pittsburgh.