

A City Council Resolution Honoring the Life of Estelle Harris-Whaley

WHEREAS, Estelle Harris-Whaley was born to the union of Bennie and Clara (Chancy) Harris on November 14, 1939 in Carrolton, Alabama. Blessed to be the 7th of 10 children, 4 preceded her in death: Johnny Lee, Ailline, Lonzie, & Cleveland, Jr.; and

WHEREAS, Born into a hardworking family in rural Alabama, working alongside her parents as sharecroppers was a way of life that instilled a strong family work ethic. Watching her mom create hearty meals from farm to table created the foundation for Estelle to become a stellar cook, managing the kitchen with expertise; and

WHEREAS, She often spoke of the struggles yet rewards of growing up in "Bama." She played around with her siblings yet endured the fright of having a burning cross erected at the crossroad near her home. Returning to Alabama in the summers brought her great joy, bonding closely with her nieces and nephews; and

WHEREAS, As a young girl, Estelle attended Pilgrim Baptist Church with her mom. From the mourning bench, Estelle answered the call of salvation, accepting Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior; for the 84 years of her life, God was her everything, Psalm 23 was her favorite scripture, she recited it often.; and

WHEREAS, In 1960, Estelle graduated from the Pickens County Training School and, after losing her mom, hopped a Greyhound later that year, making her way to Chicago and joining her other siblings living in the big city. She immediately began establishing friendships and working to foster a new beginning, taking continued education courses.

WHEREAS, In 1962, she met and married the love of her life, her lifelong partner of 61 years, Jeffery T. Whaley. To their union, her two children were born, Melanie & Jeffery, Jr. A young mom, she showered her babies with love, giving the best possible, working hard to provide them with a parochial education. She was a hands-on, devoted mom, from being the "playground mom" at Resurrection to attending Jeff Jr's basketball games at St. Joseph to walking in the Trinity Walk-a-Thon with Mel; and

WHEREAS, Her work life was vast, including working at Spiegel Catalog House, the US Postal Service, and as a school bus driver for special needs children. However, her work life became fulfilled when she joined alongside her husband in their janitorial business, JW High-Tech Maintenance. Rising in the wee hours of the morning to travel far north to clean office buildings, her life as a wife and mother took on new meaning, allowing the family to move from a 2-bedroom apartment on the west side of Chicago to a cozy home of 44 years.

WHEREAS, In 1980, she joined Broadview Baptist Church under the pastorship of Clarence Hopson, laboring there for 23 years. In 2003, she decided to change her membership, joining her husband and children at Rock of Ages Baptist Church under the pastorship of Marvin E. Wiley. Serving on the Outreach Ministry, she loved serving those in need, pulling up to their door in her Beetle hand delivering groceries. Estelle was a generous giver. The gift of encouragement and help, she would give the shirt off her back and always a comforting word to anyone in need; and

WHEREAS, With the buzzing spirit of entrepreneurship, she and her hubby created Britches Unlimited in Maywood in the early 80s, selling men's and women's designer denim. The business was the catalyst to delve into the retail world. She later worked alongside her husband at Whaley's Fish & Shrimp, a family-owned restaurant of 12 years; and

WHEREAS, Estelle's greatest work-life accomplishment was the creation of Essential Elements-Chicago. Working alongside Melanie and spanning three decades allowed her to meet amazing women and bring her fashion insight to many. Her style was iconic; customers trusted her and wanted "Stelle's" look, she would often boast about getting women off department store racks by introducing them to eclectic and unique fashion options; and

WHEREAS, Once her husband retired, she stepped back as Mel took the helm to grow the business exponentially. How proud she was to see the creation of a website allowing Essential Elements to ship to women worldwide. Estelle treasured and fostered many relationships; customers became friends, travel buddies, and spiritual sisters; and

WHEREAS, Estelle leaves to cherish her life her dear husband, Jeffery, Sr; daughter, Melanie and son, Jeffery, Jr (Lisa); grandsons, Jeffery, III (Nakendra), Joshua, & Elijah; great-grandchildren, Jeremiah and Braelynn. Brothers, Marvin (Teresa), James, Robert, Bobby (Jacqueline). 2-lifelong friends, Carolean Blackmon (Indiana) & Margaret Woodall (New Jersey); a plethora of nieces, nephews, and dear friends; and

THEREFORE, Be It Resolved, That the Mayor and members of the City Council of the City of Chicago, do hereby express our deep sorrow on the passing of and extend to her family our sincere condolences; and

Be It Further Resolved That a suitable copy of this resolution be prepared and presented to the family of Mrs. Estelle Harris-Whaley.



Michelle A. Harris
Alderman, 8th Ward