

RESOLUTION NO. 47
Robert T. Smith aka “Piano Slim”

WHEREAS, Robert T. Smith, aka “Piano Slim” was born in LaGrange, Texas on August 1, 1928 to Elvina Thompson and George Smith, a family of sharecroppers in the Roundtop Community; he was the youngest of 18 children; Robert was preceded in death by his parents, 17 siblings, and 3 grandchildren (Robin, Malik, and Irvin); and

WHEREAS, Slim began working in Houston clubs as a singer and also learned to play the drums and saxophone with notable area bluesmen; his lung was damaged after being shot in the back, due to mistaken identity, so he began to concentrate on the piano; and

WHEREAS, after hearing about a new record label starting up in St. Louis, Missouri, he came here in 1959 and recorded his first sides for the Bobbin label; around that same time he began playing piano behind great artists such as Ike Turner, Billy Gayles, Albert King, and Little Milton; and

WHEREAS, after starting a family, Robert put music on the back burner and accepted a job with the State Hospital as a psychiatric aid, working with disabled children; years later, his love of playing the blues resurfaced and he began playing piano for a group called the “Bluesmachine”; eventually, Robert T. Smith became known as “Piano Slim and the Bluesmachine,” and, at the insistence of St. Louis legend Henry Townsend, executives from the European record label Swingmaster came looking for Slim; and

WHEREAS, his first album for the Swingmaster label, “Mean Woman Blues,” was recorded in August of 1981 and was followed by other recordings and singles; in 1983 his album “Gateway To The Blues” was released leading to six European tours featuring Piano Slim as either a headliner, supporting act, or sideman; and

WHEREAS, in 1991 he was back in St. Louis and continued to perform at local clubs and work with the area’s notable bluesmen, such as Tommy Bankhead, J.R. Reed, Oliver Sain, Johnny Johnson, and Doc Terry; and

WHEREAS, as time went on “Piano Slim” and his band the Blues Inquisition performed together through the mid-90’s and in 1993, they recorded the album “Minnie Skirt,” his best album produced to date; after retiring as a cabdriver in 2003, he began playing the blues again and later released a CD titled “Sneaky People” on Swingmaster’s label; and

WHEREAS, Robert “Piano Slim” Smith was back, and now his legacy lives on through his music and family who will always cherish his memory; his three devoted daughters, Jeanetta, Ramona, and Kelly; his stepchildren, Lonzo, Leah, and Lelonnie Smith; 13 grandchildren; five great-grandchildren; and a host of nieces, nephews, friends, and musicians.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of Aldermen of the City of St. Louis that we pause to recognize and acknowledge Robert T. Smith, “Piano Slim,” for his many contributions to the St. Louis blues community and his tireless efforts to promote the blues around the world throughout his life and we offer our sincere thanks to his family. We further direct the Clerk of this Board to spread a copy of this Resolution across the minutes of these proceedings and to prepare a memorial copy to the end that it may be presented to the family of Robert T. Smith at a time and place deemed appropriate by the Sponsor.

Introduced this 10th day of June, 2016, by:

The Honorable Lewis E. Reed, President, Board of Aldermen

Adopted this 10th day of June, 2016, as attested by:

Timothy O’Connell
Clerk, Board of Aldermen

Lewis E. Reed
President, Board of Aldermen