



Legislation Text

File #: 39747, **Version:** 1

Fiscal Note

No appropriation required.

Title

Recognizing the legacy, creativity and sense of humor of Leon Varjian on the cultural landscape of Madison and proclaiming February 23, 2016 to be LEON VARJIAN DAY.

Body

WHEREAS, Leon Varjian enrolled at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1977, bringing his joie de vivre, his puckish sense of humor, and antics to Madison from New Jersey and Indiana; and,

WHEREAS, Leon began his University of Wisconsin student activism by collecting signatures to rename the University of Wisconsin-Madison the University of New Jersey, in part because New Jersey did not have a "University of..." and students at UW could attend a prestigious Eastern school; and,

WHEREAS, this petition failed but didn't deter Leon from running for Wisconsin Student Association (WSA) where he served as a student senator; and,

WHEREAS, Leon ran for a higher position (Vice-President) on the Pail and Shovel Party with his running mate, Jim Mallon, and changed forever the cultural landscape of the University and the city of Madison and the University's position in the world of college pranks; and,

WHEREAS, the Pail and Shovel Party promised to bring the Statue of Liberty to Madison and in February 1979, students and other citizens awoke to Lady Liberty's 22-foot head and crown from the nose up and 40-foot arm from the wrist up to the torch on a frozen Lake Mendota located near the UW Memorial Union; and,

WHEREAS, this fulfillment of this campaign promise to bring the Statue of Liberty merited an entire chapter in the 1992 book, "If At All Possible, Involve a Cow: The Book of College Pranks"; and,

WHEREAS, the Pail and Shovel party hosted Halloween toga parties bringing over 10,000 revelers to State Street and UW Lot 60; and,

WHEREAS, the Pail and Shovel Party's other memorable prank was the appearance of 1,008 pink flamingo lawn ornaments on Bascom Hill on the first day of the Fall semester 1979; and,

WHEREAS, Leon took his energy to organize the "Leon Varjian's Boombox Band" whose members, included Mayor Sensenbrenner and other notable officials and community leaders, wearing retired University of Indiana red and gold band jackets with boomboxes on their shoulders that blasted out Souza music from local radio stations while marching down State Street or at Camp Randall with the UW Marching Band; and,

WHEREAS, Leon led the now legendary "Muskie Cheer" for Madison's Triple A baseball team in the "1980's" when they first arrived at Breese Stevens Stadium; and,

WHEREAS, Leon and Jim produced the "Vern and Evelyn Show," a local access cable TV variety show hosted

by two mice, and included the appearance by Allen Ginsberg for a poetry contest as part of a special hour-long show on WISC-TV; and,

WHEREAS, Leon's creative spirit developed Speed Bowling and several alders participated in the 1986 U.S. Open Valentine's Day Bowling Tournament at the Eagles Club and points were given for a) outstanding team outfits; b) poise and graceful cheering; c) appropriate feminist/non-competitive enthusiasm, with points deducted for being overly critical towards people with a different cultural perspective; d) sincerely demonstrated desire to dominate others and achieve a false sense of self-worth through winning; and creative use of flowers in a bowling context and the Council team didn't win; and,

WHEREAS, Leon left Madison to pursue his natural talent as a high school math teacher and advisor in his home state of New Jersey; and,

WHEREAS, Leon used his talents and Mallomars to teach his students the secrets of math; and,

WHEREAS, Leon never forgot his Wisconsin roots and was a major supporter of the University of Wisconsin - even lending his hand in raising funds to "Fill the Hill" campaign with pink flamingoes; and,

WHEREAS, Lady Liberty on Lake Mendota, Pink Flamingoes on Bascom Hill, and Leon Varjian's Boombbox Band postcards have been mass produced and sent all over the world sharing these legendary pranks, near and far; and,

WHEREAS, the City of Madison recognized the Pail and Shovel Party's impact on our urban landscape and declared the Pink Flamingo the official bird of the City of Madison in 2009; and,

WHEREAS, Leon, a cancer survivor, died of cardiac tamponade on September 29, 2015,

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Common Council of Madison recognizes the legacy, creativity and sense of humor of Leon Varjian on the cultural landscape of Madison and hereby proclaims February 23, 2016 to be **LEON VARJIAN DAY**.