

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 124

BY SENATOR MORRELL

A RESOLUTION

To commend Cyndi Nguyen upon receipt of a fellowship presented by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation Community Leadership Network for her exemplary efforts to broaden educational opportunities and after-school programs in New Orleans East.

WHEREAS, Cyndi Nguyen is a community activist of the highest order; she works as an agent for positive change to promote access to educational and economic possibilities for the residents of her community, in particular, the enrichment of the lives of children; and

WHEREAS, she has amassed scarce funding and manpower to bring much needed services to all the people who call New Orleans East their home, a rich gumbo of ethnicities that benefit from her determination and commitment; and

WHEREAS, her activism is deeply rooted in her own personal experience and life's journey; Cyndi arrived in New Orleans in 1975, as a five year old Vietnamese National and refugee seeking political asylum in the United States after the Vietnam Conflict; and

WHEREAS, Cyndi's first-person experiences with language barriers and a lack of knowledge of available social services remain at the heart of her advocacy to provide aid to those persons of similar circumstance who view the United States as a gateway to a brighter future for themselves and their families; and

WHEREAS, Cyndi Nguyen is founder and executive director of VIET, Vietnamese Initiatives in Economic Training, a nonprofit organization that functions as a neighborhood resource annex for a myriad of services that include a learning and cultural center, a disaster aid headquarters, and a venue for after-school programs and summer camp for area children; and

WHEREAS, the VIET center has evolved during its fourteen year existence into a multi-service complex that provides programs, such as family resources assistance, parent-to-school assistance, senior activities, financial literacy and small business planning, translation and interpreting services, language classes, and provides assistance for those who seek citizenship, health care, and social services; and

WHEREAS, the VIET center is presently housed in the former St. Brigid Catholic Church, a casualty of Hurricane Katrina that could not reopen after the storm; the Archdiocese of New Orleans extended a thirty-year lease of the building to the organization; and

WHEREAS, with unrelenting determination Cyndi marshaled neighborhood manpower to transform the dilapidated structure into a community asset with herculean site improvements of remodeling, landscaping, pedestrian walkways, and the planting of trees and gardens that resulted in a brightly colored playground, a volleyball court, and a pristine outdoor classroom setting; and

WHEREAS, the prestigious W. K. Kellogg Foundation emphasizes the importance of healthy child development and the reduction of social inequities that inhibit the progress of and future prospects for America's youth; and Cyndi Nguyen is most deserving of this accolade as an acknowledgment of her inexhaustible service to the community; and

WHEREAS, Cyndi Nguyen instituted the after-school program called "Afterschool Academy" to ensure that children from pre-kindergarten through eighth grade have a safe and structured environment; Afterschool Academy focuses on homework assistance, learning opportunities, such as STEM studies (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math), community service, robotics, and enrichment activities that include art, cultural learning, karate, poetry, and gardening; and

WHEREAS, the Summer Adventure Program, a nine week summer camp experience, provides learning and recreational participation that includes instruction in guitar and piano, dance, pottery, photography, swimming, fishing, sports, and service days; and

WHEREAS, although her travels took her far away from home to earn a bachelor's degree in social work from Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa, and a master's degree in management from the University of Phoenix, Cyndi returned to New Orleans in 1998; and

WHEREAS, through VIET, her mission continues to be one of service to the needs of the Vietnamese community and other minorities and of help to bridge the gap of cultural, social, and language barriers into the economic mainstream of American society; and

WHEREAS, Cyndi has taken on many leadership roles, such as that of FEMA community liaison after Hurricane Katrina devastated much of the area, then after the storm

she established the Einstein Charter School in the Michoud area; and

WHEREAS, her altruism and strength of character have not gone unnoticed, Cyndi has been named a Louisiana Afterschool Ambassador and a Young Leadership Council Role Model; her nonprofit VIET was featured in *Fortune 500* magazine; and she has been the recipient of many honors that include LSU Women Pathfinder Award, Small Business Minority Award from the Jefferson Chamber of Commerce, Champion for Kids Award from the Louisiana Children Trust Fund, the O'Hara Award from the Asian Pacific American Society, Community Quarterback Award from the New Orleans Saints, WDSU Making A Difference Award, Making Things Brighter Award from Entergy of New Orleans, and Louisiana Women in Philanthropy Award from Louisiana Association for Nonprofit Organizations; and

WHEREAS, her community action has been a collaborative effort with assistance from corporate sponsors and nonprofit partners that include Entergy of New Orleans, BP, New Orleans Hornets, Jasmine Rice, HandsOn, City Year, Common Ground Relief, and Lotus Care; and

WHEREAS, Cyndi has tackled large scale initiatives to promote healthy living and child-friendly environments such as National Childhood Obesity Awareness, "Lights on Afterschool" to increase public awareness of the importance of enrichment programs that are vital to personal growth, and "Boo in Michoud" a safe place for trick or treat celebrations; and

WHEREAS, Cyndi Nguyen embraces the tenets of optimal child development expressed by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation which are education, health, and secure family surroundings, and she strives to bring to fruition civic engagement, community service, and ethnic equity within the New Orleans East neighborhood.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby congratulate Cyndi Nguyen upon receipt of a W. K. Kellogg Foundation Community Leadership Network fellowship for her commitment to children and education.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Cyndi Nguyen is hereby commended for her efforts to improve the emotional, intellectual, physical, and cultural growth of the residents of the New Orleans East community.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be transmitted to  
Cyndi Nguyen, executive director of VIET.

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PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE