

Legislation Text

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Recognizing and honoring the legacy of Dr. George J. Beichl for his bravery as a prisoner of war, his work at Saint Joseph's University as a professor and chair of the chemistry department, and for his significant contributions to the Philadelphia German-American community.

WHEREAS, George J. Beichl, Ph.D. formerly of West Philadelphia was a prisoner of war during World War II. In addition, he was a chemistry professor for five decades at Saint Joseph's University and he was formerly president of the German Society of Pennsylvania; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Beichl was born on August 20, 1918, in Brewerytown to immigrant parents who met in Philadelphia, and was raised with a strong focus on education; and

WHEREAS, After graduating at the top of his class from St. Joseph's Preparatory School on a scholarship, Dr. Beichl then attended St. Joseph's University earning his bachelor's degree in chemistry in 1939; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Beichl was draft into the U. S. Army in 1944, and was sent to Germany the next January as an infantryman; and

WHEREAS, Soon after his enlistment, Dr. Beichl's family received a telegram informing them of his death, which was reported in *The Inquirer* on February 22, 1945. Dr. Beichl later explained that he was living in dire circumstances in Stalag XIIA, a prisoner-of-war camp in Limburg, Germany; and

WHEREAS, As a Prisoner of War, the German-speaking Dr. Beichl befriended a sympathetic German guard, Karl Schaeffer who helped keep Beichl alive by smuggling him food, and gave him a book, *Das Flammende Wort [the flaming word]*, a novel about Germany's first journalist that Dr. Beichl used as a diary to keep his mind sharp and his memories clear; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Beichl was rescued and liberated on March 27, 1945 when Allied planes bombed the train as he was being transported and the now-freed prisoners gathered in a field, arranging their bodies to spell out "POW" which ultimately prompted their rescue; and

WHEREAS, Upon his return to the United States, Dr. Beichl continued his contribution to the war by working on the propulsion for the Manhattan Project to develop the atomic bomb; and

WHEREAS, When Dr. Beichl completed his enlistment, he resumed his life in Philadelphia earning his Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania in 1953, and returning to St. Joseph's to teach chemistry, and to chair the Chemistry Department for more than 20 years, before retiring in 1989; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Beichl was president of the Philadelphia German Society from 1974 to 1993, and he helped found the national organization now known as the German-American Heritage Foundation of the USA; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Beichl received a chest full of medals, including the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star for the

astonishing events that he witnessed and challenges that he overcame during World War II as a prisoner of war. His bravery was honored last year in a gala ceremony on May 21, 2014 at City Hall in Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Beichl was known for his work at Saint Joseph's University as a professor and the Chair of the chemistry department, and for his significant contributions to Philadelphia's German-American community. On February 6, 2015, Philadelphia lost a strong, forward-thinking leader and who generously contributed his talents to his community; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That Council does hereby recognize and honor the legacy of George J. Beichl for his bravery and his many invaluable contributions to public service, education, and the community.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Council express condolences to Dr. Beichl's wife, Isabella, and their daughters and beloved grandchildren.