



City of Philadelphia

City Council
Chief Clerk's Office
402 City Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Legislation Text

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Recognizing and honoring the life and career of former professional golfer and Philadelphian, John J. McDermott, Jr., who will be memorialized with a historical marker in his childhood neighborhood of Kingsessing in Southwest Philadelphia on October 9, 2014.

WHEREAS, John J. McDermott, Jr. was born and raised in Philadelphia. The son of a mailman, "Johnny" received high marks at West Philadelphia High School before the allure of a professional golf career led to him drop out in 1908 before he had graduated; and

WHEREAS, McDermott began his career in golf at Aronimink Golf Club, once located in the Kingsessing section of Southwest Philadelphia, where he learned much about the game from the Club's longtime professional, Walter Reynolds; and

WHEREAS, Johnny moved from Aronimink to Merion and then to his first head professional position at the Merchantville Country Club in 1910, and then his skills were recruited by the more affluent and historic Atlantic City Country Club. Also in 1910, at the age of only 18, McDermott played in his second U.S. Open Championship, held that year at famed Philadelphia Cricket Club's "St. Martin's Course", just inside the Philadelphia limits in Chestnut Hill. At the end of the regulation 72 holes, McDermott stood tied with Alex and MacDonald Smith, professional golfing brothers from Scotland. In the succeeding 18 hole playoff, McDermott would finish just behind the senior Scotsman; and

WHEREAS, After winning the Philadelphia Open in 1910 and 1911, McDermott made his return to the national stage at the 1911 U.S. Open held at the Chicago Golf Club. Again tied after regulation, McDermott won his playoff by three shots over competitors Mike Brady and George Simpson. McDermott became both the first American to win the National championship, and also still holds the record as the youngest U.S. Open champion ever at only 19; and

WHEREAS, McDermott defended his title at the 1912 U.S. Open held at The Country Club of Buffalo. Shooting at 72 hole total of 294, he finished two strokes below the par of 296, making McDermott the first player to break par in the U.S. Open, or any major stroke-play tournament to that point; and

WHEREAS, Johnny continued his terrific run in 1913, winning the prestigious Western Open at the Memphis Country Club in Tennessee. McDermott also won the Shawnee Open held in Shawnee-on-Delaware, PA. That tournament was a precursor to the 1913 U.S. Open, and McDermott took down the two top golfers in the world at that time, Ted Ray and Harry Vardon. Johnny would finish in 8th place, four shots behind the eventual winner Francis Ouimet at the U.S. Open that year; and

WHEREAS, McDermott would finish in the top-10 again at the 1914 U.S. Open, but his career would never be the same. While returning from the 1914 British Open Championship in Scotland, McDermott's ship collided with another, sustaining severe damage, and forcing McDermott to flee in a lifeboat. McDermott returned home later that summer but his health was not the same; and

WHEREAS, Later that year, while in the clubhouse at Atlantic City Country Club, McDermott collapsed from what was then called a “nervous breakdown”. Unable to properly diagnose McDermott’s condition, at 23 years old he became a ward of his sisters, alternating between their homes and Norristown Hospital where he received care. He was permanently committed to the hospital in 1916. McDermott never regained his professional career, and he died without fanfare on August 1, 1971; and

WHEREAS, McDermott, along with fellow Americans Ouimet and Walter Hagan, represented that American golfers could compete on the same stage as the best from Scotland and England. Prominent early 20th century sportswriter Grantland Rice said of McDermott, “John was the greatest golfer America has ever produced, amateur or professional, when it came to a combination of nerve, coolness and all-around skill from the tee to the green.”; and

WHEREAS, McDermott’s legacy continues to live on. On October 9, 2014, a historical marker denoting McDermott’s achievements will be placed at the Kingsessing Library near his childhood home. Also, a golf tournament will be held at Philadelphia Cricket Club to raise money for the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, and specifically for children’s mental health care and research and to support after school programs through the Free Library of Philadelphia; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That Council does hereby honor and recognize the life and career of former professional golfer and Philadelphian, John J. McDermott, Jr.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to event organizer R. John Burnes as evidence of the sincere sentiments of this legislative body.