

Legislation Details (With Text)

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Title: Also naming South Quince Street between Locust and Walnut Streets in the “Gayborhood” as “Les Harrison Way” to honor the life and legacy of one of Philadelphia’s first and nationally famous African American Drag Queens.

Sponsors: Councilmember Squilla

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Attachments: 1. Resolution No. 23059800.pdf, 2. Signature23059800

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9/21/2023	0	CITY COUNCIL			
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Also naming South Quince Street between Locust and Walnut Streets in the “Gayborhood” as “Les Harrison Way” to honor the life and legacy of one of Philadelphia’s first and nationally famous African American Drag Queens.

WHEREAS, Les Harrison was born Albert Raymond Price changing his name to Les Harrison to be used as a stage name in the mid-sixties. This would be the name he would use for the rest of his life and the only name the LGBTQ+ community and friends knew him by; and

WHEREAS, Les Harrison grew up in South Philadelphia around 7th and Kator Streets. So, it was only natural that when he started to discover who he was that he started hanging out in the “Gay Ghetto” what is now known as the “Gayborhood” on South Quince Street between Locust and Walnut Streets. He would frequent places like the Forrest Lounge which is now known as the Bike Stop. Les was a teenager then and would hang out in this area for most of his later teens and early 20’s; and

WHEREAS, Most drag shows were performed in town, so when Les heard that a new drag queen group called the “Fabulous Fakes” were forming in the late 60’s, he begged the group to let him become a member! It was hard to break into the performance scene back then as a young black drag queen in Philly. Eventually he was invited to join the group’s chorus, when they saw how talented he was, they asked him to become a member of the “Fabulous Fakes”. Later, he was asked to travel around the country performing with the group; and

WHEREAS, Les created his own show called “Viva Les Boys”. He would perform at the Forrest Lounge when he wasn’t traveling with the “Fabulous Fakes”. He was one of the First Black Drag Queen in Philadelphia to have a touring female impersonation show; and

WHEREAS, The “Fabulous Fakes” were managed by Johnny Scarlet and when Johnny died on stage at the Forrest Lounge, he left the show along with all the fabulous costumes to Les since he was the only original “Fabulous Fake” left. After Johnny passed, Les continued to perform at the Forrest Lounge until it was sold and

became the Bike Stop (a leather bar) in 1982; and

WHEREAS, Les paved the way for people of color, drag queens and female impersonators. Les was known as Mr. Shirley Bassey, because she was who he impersonated the most. He participated in fundraisers and events for the community more than any other performer in Philadelphia at the time and went unpaid. He did this for love of family and community. He performed for over 53 years in the “Gayborhood” and around the country; and

WHEREAS, Naming South Quince Street between Locust Street and Walnut Street as “Les Harrison Way” will make a powerful statement not only to our city but to our drag community that we will never forget where it all began for one of the First African American Drag Queens in Philadelphia. This symbol shows the diversity and inclusion Philly has for people of color, drag and the LGTBQ+ community; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, that it hereby renames South Quince Street between Locust and Walnut Streets as “Les Harrison Way” to honor the life and legacy of one of Philadelphia’s first African American Drag Queens.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to the family of Les Harrison, further evidencing the sincere respect and admiration of this legislative body.