

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 328

By Niceley

A RESOLUTION to recognize and honor Jarnagin Motor Company for more than a century of service to Grainger County.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the members of this General Assembly recognize those Tennessee businesses that have a longstanding commitment to providing exceptional service to their customers; and

WHEREAS, one such estimable entity is Jarnagin Motor Company, the oldest single-family-owned Ford dealership in the State; the company recently announced it will be shuttering its doors for good, bringing to a close more than 102 years of dedicated service to the people of Grainger County; and

WHEREAS, Jarnagin Motor Company was founded in 1915 by William Franklin "Bill" Jarnagin and John R. Jarnagin, whose wife, Lucy Tomlinson, was the daughter of Captain Thomas Tomlinson, who owned Tate Springs Resort; the resort attracted some of the nation's wealthiest families, such as the Firestones, Studebakers, and Fords; and

WHEREAS, Captain Tomlinson's personal relationship with Henry Ford and their mutual desire to build a Ford dealership in Tate Springs led to the opening of the Jarnagin Ford Dealership, where customers could purchase the now-iconic Ford Model T, on September 16, 1916; and

WHEREAS, in 1917, the dealership relocated to Rutledge, as Henry Ford had preferred dealerships to be located as close to the county seat as possible; at the new location, the Jarnagins offered Fordson tractor sales and service, parts sales, and a full-service gas station in addition to vehicle sales and service; they also added the Lincoln and Mercury brands to their auto sales; and

WHEREAS, Jarnagin Motor Company has grown and adapted throughout its long history, as in 1925, when Bill Jarnagin engineered and built a device that allowed two men, rather than six, to unload a T Model chassis and body from a train car, thus lowering the cost of labor; his invention was patented and subsequently sold to other dealerships; and

WHEREAS, in 1957, a fire broke out at the dealership when a stove turned over onto the oil-soaked wooden floors, igniting a blaze; following the fire, the Jarnagins had to start over, a fate made easier by the benevolence of Claude Gray, the owner of the original Chevrolet dealership in Rutledge, who offered the Jarnagins use of his old building; and

WHEREAS, Jarnagin Motor Company also withstood the Great Depression, though, at that time, no one had any money with which to buy cars and the dealership had no cars to sell; it also continued through the 1970s, when interest rates and fuel costs were high and the demand for small cars outpaced the larger vehicles they were selling. It was then that John Jarnagin, grandson of Bill Jarnagin and current owner and CEO of the dealership, took over the business at the young age of nineteen; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Jarnagin feels that now is the right time to close the business as technological advancements with regard to electric and hybrid infrastructure will make operating much more expensive in the near future; and

WHEREAS, for more than a century, Jarnagin Motor Company has been an economic staple and an unbroken link to the history of Grainger County and of automobiles in this country; it is most fitting that this legendary business be recognized; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we recognize and honor Jarnagin Motor Company for more than 100 years of service to the people of Grainger County.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.