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HONORING THE GILA VALLEY ARTS COUNCIL ON 40 YEARS OF SERVICE

Mr. Speaker,

I rise today to recognize and celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the Gila Valley Arts Council, an organization whose enduring commitment to the performing arts has expanded and inspired the lives of countless residents across southeastern Arizona.

Founded in 1985 by Cecilia Roudebush, Mary Hartung, Monika Ragland, and Mary Barnmann, the Gila Valley Arts Council was established to support and sponsor visual and performing arts in Arizona's Gila Valley. Over the past four decades, the Council has remained steadfast in its mission: to promote, support, and sponsor performing arts in southeastern Arizona, with a particular emphasis on reaching young people through its School Residency Program and public performances.

The Council's impact has been profound. Through partnerships with schools and community organizations across Graham and Greenlee Counties, the Gila Valley Arts Council has opened doors for students to experience world class artistry. In the 2025-2026 season alone, the Council reached a total of 4,689 students and community members.

A pivotal moment in the organization's history came in 1991 with the involvement of Dr. Jack Kukuk, whose long and distinguished tenure as Artistic Director expanded the Council's reach and elevated its programming for more than three decades. Through his guidance, internationally renowned performers graced stages in the Gila Valley, bringing global culture to the local community. Dr. Kukuk concluded his service as Artistic Director in 2025, leaving behind a lasting legacy of artistic excellence and expanded opportunity for generations of students and residents to come.

The Gila Valley Arts Council's dedication to cultural enrichment has not gone unnoticed. In 1995, the organization was honored with the Community Award at the Arizona Governor's Arts Awards, recognizing its outstanding contributions to arts education and community life.

Today, the Council continues its work under the leadership of a dedicated Board of Directors led by President Tom Green. Together, the Board carries forward a legacy of service, creativity, and opportunity.

For 40 years, the Gila Valley Arts Council has brought inspiration to Arizonans, expanding horizons, nurturing young talent, and strengthening community through the arts. Their work reminds us that access to culture and creativity is a vital part of a thriving and connected society.

It is with great honor and deep appreciation that I recognize the Gila Valley Arts Council on this remarkable milestone and commend all those who have contributed to its enduring success.