Item 16.13

Notices of Motion

Vale John Shakespeare

By Councillor Miller

It is resolved that:

(A) Council note:

(i) Sydney Morning Herald illustrator John Shakespeare, who died on 9 June 2025 at the too-young age of 63 of cancer;

(ii) John was a Sydneysider through and through; he may have been Brisbane-born, but Bondi Junction, Bondi and the eastern suburbs have been his base for much of the 4 decades he lived in this city that he loves. Over the course of his more than 40-year career as an illustrator, 'Shakes' as he was known, has delighted readers of the Sydney Morning Herald with his wonderfully whimsical depictions of all aspects of Sydney life;

(iii) from the pocket cartoons he did on the daily letters page, to the intricate illustrations on the Opinion pages, for columnists like Peter Hartcher and Peter FitzSimons, his work was one of the most familiar features of this city's oldest metropolitan daily newspaper, readers, colleagues and even his subjects, many of them politicians, loved Shakes, not just his artwork, but who he was as a person;

(iv) he moved here from Brisbane's Courier-Mail in 1985 to start a job on the afternoon tabloid The Sun, where he drew everything from sports stars to the crosswords. When that paper closed in 1988, he moved over to The Herald, where for the next 36 years, he drew almost every Australian politician;

(v) not only Prime Ministers and Premiers, to people and their pets, no job was too big or too small. Whenever he judged the Sun-Herald's 'I'll draw your pet competition' he'd often break the rules, by sending prizes not just to the winner but to the children who came second or third, or kids with disabilities who had just given it a go;

(vi) one of the messages that gave his family the most comfort these past few weeks, was the second prize winner in the 'I'll draw your pet competition' who treasures the illustration he did of her pet axolotl. That was John. He even drew the beer labels Blondz and Jess' wedding;

(vii) in 1995 he won a Walkley Award, the highest accolade in journalism, and his work is in some of best collections from Old Parliament House, the Museum of Australia and the State Library. His illustrations are even part of the Sydney City Council collection, on one of his favourite topics: cycling;

(viii) he was an avid cyclist – motorbikes, e-bikes, regular old pushbikes and skateboards, when the Herald was based at Pyrmont, he often rode to and from his home in Bondi Junction on the Oxford Street Cycleway;

(ix) like an athlete, he transformed when he climbed onto two wheels, on a pushbike he could go through the gears on one wheel which he often did on the streets of Sydney; he was regularly spotted doing 'wheelies' going up the hill to Taylor Square on the Oxford Street cycleway, leaving behind buses in his dust;

(x) he loved how much Lord Mayor Clover Moore did for cycling in the City; she was a regular subject of his cartoons – on a bike. The warmth with which he approached his work meant many famous Australians, across the political spectrum, are proud to have been his subjects;

(xi) as Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said in a video message sent to him at a gathering a few weeks before he died: "One of the things that really characterises all of your remarkable work, is that you can be incisive without being cutting, your cartoons are generous, they show people's character … that says a lot about the nature of your spirit.";

(xii) the Prime Minister was filmed in front of a Shakespeare of Albanese walking Toto the dog, which takes pride of place on the walls of The Lodge;

(xiii) John's work hangs in the office of Sydney's Independent Lord Mayor as well as Nationals MP Barnaby Joyce whose cartoon of himself and wife Vikki Campion hangs in their living room, while former Labor Sydney City Councillor Meredith Bergmann, so loved his depiction of her 'skinny arms' in one CBD illustration, she rang and asked to buy it; of course he gave it to her for free, as he did most people who rang him after seeing themselves drawn by him in the daily CBD column;

(xiv) even Australia's richest woman, Gina Rinehart, has a Shakespeare in her office (AND she likes it). Whenever the call came from a pollie or businessperson for one of his drawings, he'd be unfailingly polite, pop it in the mail to them or donate it to the charity of their choice;

(xv) when it comes to drawing, Tony Abbott may have been one of his favourite Prime Ministers, no one quite drew Tony as a chimpanzee quite like John, and Gladys Berejiklian his personal favourite NSW Premier to draw. But Clover Moore transformed the city he loved into a bike-friendly space, which as a cyclist he sincerely loved;

(xvi) John was beloved by not just readers, there has been a huge outpouring of grief from them, but also his Herald colleagues, many of whom own a caricature he'd drawn of them among their most prized possessions;

(xvii) SMH editor Bevan Shields said Shakespeare's "trademark positivity, optimism and ability to see the humour in everything – including his own health battle – was with him until the end";

(xviii) John is survived by the other great loves of his life, his wife Annalisa (whose birthday is today – 23 June) his son Lukas, his dogs Freddy and Cheeka, and his siblings Jen, Robert, Tim and Russell and their spouses and offspring, mother-in-law Wendy and brother-in-law Krister;

(xix) his famous Shakespeare scrawl that accompanied his newspaper work was as familiar to Sydney readers as the distinctive cursive scrawl of Arthur Stace, who chalked Eternity over the city's streets. John also leaves 'wheelie' marks all over the city's cycle paths; and

(xx) he was a rare gem who will shine on in the hearts of those who loved him, and an exemplary Sydneysider for us all;

(B) all persons attending this meeting of Council observe one minute's silence to commemorate the life of John Shakespeare; and

(C) the Lord Mayor be requested to write to John's family expressing Council's condolences.

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