

By: Hernandez

H.C.R. No. 81

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

1           WHEREAS, The Denver Harbor neighborhood, in northeast  
2 Houston, is one of the oldest communities in the Bayou City; and

3           WHEREAS, Bounded on the north by Wallisville Road, on the  
4 west by the Houston Belt and Terminal Railroad, on the south by the  
5 Southern Pacific Railroad, and on the east by the Port Authority  
6 Railroad, the area was first settled in the 1890s; platting in 1911  
7 and again in 1913 created what were originally four distinct  
8 subdivisions: Denver, Harbor, Harbordale, and Liberty Heights; and

9           WHEREAS, Many early residents were Texans who had left  
10 hardscrabble farms for the city in hopes of making a better life for  
11 themselves and their families; these citizens found work on the  
12 railroads and at various industrial companies that sprang up along  
13 the Houston Ship Channel; and

14           WHEREAS, Those who put down roots in Denver Harbor found it a  
15 good place to raise a family; among the neighborhood's amenities  
16 were Charles Eliot Elementary School, churches, drug stores, and  
17 the Globe Theater, where children could watch the latest Hollywood  
18 westerns for the sum of nine cents; and

19           WHEREAS, The Great Depression hit Denver Harbor hard, and  
20 many families in the neighborhood lost their homes; as the 1930s  
21 drew to an end, however, a curious occurrence did much to lift the  
22 spirits of the beleaguered community: on June 1, 1939, the morning  
23 sun revealed the word "Podunk" emblazoned on the formerly blank  
24 side of the local water tower; though the city tried repeatedly to

1 cover over the word, the name would always reappear within a few  
2 days; and

3 WHEREAS, Inspired by the spunky defiance of the sign's  
4 unknown painter, area residents soon began asserting their identity  
5 as Podunkers, and the name was even adopted by a youth basketball  
6 team, the Podunk Skunks; and

7 WHEREAS, Today, Denver Harbor reflects the ethnic diversity  
8 of Houston itself, with Hispanics forming the core of its  
9 population; the community is currently undergoing revitalization,  
10 especially along Lyons Avenue, where a new fire station has opened  
11 and a number of new businesses have set up shop; residents are also  
12 served by four elementary schools, a middle school, and a private  
13 school; and

14 WHEREAS, The story of this resilient neighborhood is told in  
15 the book *Where the Hell Is Podunk, Texas?*, which won an honorable  
16 mention at the 2006 Independent Publisher Book Awards; Dr. Jay  
17 Grady, the volume's author, grew up in Denver Harbor; following the  
18 publication of his historical account, a Podunk reunion brought  
19 together many present and former residents aged 80 and older; and

20 WHEREAS, Notable Houstonians who have resided in Denver  
21 Harbor include Richard Vara, Harris County justice of the peace,  
22 Tina Reyes, member of the board of the Houston Independent School  
23 District, Raul Martinez, the first Mexican American constable in  
24 Harris County, and Elias C. "Ace" Martinez, the first Mexican  
25 American firefighter in Houston; assigned to Station 27, in Denver  
26 Harbor, Mr. Martinez spent 36 years with the department and  
27 achieved the rank of sergeant before his retirement; in December

1 2005, the department dedicated Fire Engine No. 27 to his memory;  
2 other prominent residents of the neighborhood have included the  
3 late Joe E. Moreno, who represented District 143 in the Texas  
4 Legislature, and his predecessors in that office, Ben T. Reyes, who  
5 also served on the Houston City Council, and Al Luna; and

6 WHEREAS, The citizens of Denver Harbor take great pride in  
7 the heritage of their community and in the unpretentious name that  
8 earlier residents made their own; it is the wish of the  
9 neighborhood, with the expressed support of the Denver Harbor Civic  
10 Club and Bill White, mayor of Houston, that this community's  
11 identification with that simple but enduring locale of the  
12 imagination be appropriately recognized, and a declaration to that  
13 effect is indeed appropriate; now, therefore, be it

14 RESOLVED, That the 80th Legislature of the State of Texas  
15 hereby designate Denver Harbor, aka Podunk, as the official  
16 Mythical Town of Texas.