

1 [Rita Semel Day - November 15, 2021]

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3 **Resolution retroactively declaring November 15, 2021, as Rita Semel Day in the City**
4 **and County of San Francisco, in recognition of her many years of outstanding service**
5 **in interfaith and civil rights work and celebrating her 100 years on this planet.**

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7 WHEREAS, Rita Semel, a native New Yorker, first came to San Francisco when her
8 parents moved here in 1939; and

9 WHEREAS, After graduating from Barnard College, she married and traveled with her
10 soldier husband, Max, until he was shipped overseas; returning to San Francisco, Rita worked
11 as a copy girl, then as a reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle; and

12 WHEREAS, When she went to work for the Chronicle, Rita had to sign a document, as
13 did many women at that time that, she would give up her job when the men returned after the
14 war; and

15 WHEREAS, When her husband returned from Army service in Europe in 1945, they
16 settled in San Francisco and Rita became the first Associate Editor of the newly formed
17 Jewish Community Bulletin; she retired from the Bulletin in 1950 when her first daughter,
18 Elisabeth, was born and began doing free-lance public relations for the March of Dimes, the
19 America-Israel Cultural Foundation, and the Israeli Consulate; and

20 WHEREAS, In 1964, as the nation was struggling for integration, civil rights, and inter-
21 ethnic and interfaith harmony, Rita served on the committee that organized the San Francisco
22 Conference on Religion and Race, and she became its coordinator for the next 25 years; and

23 WHEREAS, During the period of 1950s and 1960s, Rita became a consulate to the
24 Jewish Community Relations Council, and eventually joined the staff as the Associate
25 Director; among the issues she worked on was overturning Proposition 14, a successful ballot

1 initiative that had nullified the Rumford Fair Housing Law which prohibited racial and other
2 discrimination in housing; ultimately, Proposition 14 was declared unconstitutional by the
3 California Supreme Court, and we thank Rita for her contributions to this matter; and

4 WHEREAS, Rita served as Associate Director and then Executive Director of the
5 Jewish Community Relations Council, where she built important coalitions and organized
6 campaigns to advance a just society; and

7 WHEREAS, For more than five decades, Rita has mobilized broad coalitions to
8 advance common causes of social concern, worked to advocate for those most in need, and
9 built long lasting relationships among the Bay Areas' many communities; and

10 WHEREAS, In addition to her important role as a co-founder of the Interfaith Center at
11 the Presidio and the San Francisco Interfaith Council, Rita has served in a prominent
12 leadership role as the first Chair of the Global Council for the United Religions Initiative; she
13 has served on the boards of Catholic Charities CYO, Family Services America, San Francisco
14 Resource and Leadership Council, Friends of the San Francisco Human Rights Commission,
15 Jewish Family & Children's Services, San Francisco Children's Rights Coalition and many
16 more; and

17 WHEREAS, In 2008, Rita was honored by the Islamic Society of San Francisco for
18 "outstanding service and achievement in interfaith dialogue among Abrahamic Faiths;" in 2011
19 the San Francisco Interfaith Council created the Rita R. Semel Endowment Fund for Interfaith
20 Work; she received the San Francisco Foundation's Community Leadership Award in 2012 for
21 her "life-long successes in creating healthy, just and inclusive communities in the Bay Area
22 and worldwide, and for building bridges of understanding to help alleviate poverty and end
23 discrimination;" in 2014 she was honored at the annual Catholic Charities CYO Loaves &
24 Fishes Gala for her more than half a century of being a champion of San Francisco's interfaith
25 dialogue with their "Faith in Action" award; and

1 WHEREAS, Rita was the co-founder of the San Francisco Interfaith Council in 1990,
2 and her tenure has been marked by orchestrating significant programs which have a direct
3 impact on the lives of San Franciscans – from the emergency winter shelter program for the
4 homeless, for which she has galvanized multi-faith and City cooperation, to the chaplaincy
5 program at the Youth Guidance Center; and

6 WHEREAS, Rita has served as the unofficial, trusted ambassador of the Jewish
7 community to other religious communities for decades; through the Jewish Community
8 Relations Council, and later working on a national level through Project Interchange, Rita has
9 led dozens of clergies from other faiths to Israel, to learn about the Jewish community’s
10 relationship to the land, people, and their history; she has introduced religious leaders from
11 throughout the Bay Area to Judaism, Jewish history, and the American and worldwide Jewish
12 experience; and

13 WHEREAS, Rita serves on the boards of Clinic by the Bay, Congregation Emanu-El
14 and Grace Cathedral; Rita was appointed by Mayor Edwin Lee to the Human Services
15 Agency’s Commission; and

16 WHEREAS, On November 15, 2021, Rita celebrated her 100 years on this planet; now,
17 therefore, be it

18 RESOLVED, That in celebration of Rita’s amazing contributions and achievements to
19 the City of San Francisco and the Bay Area, the Board of Supervisors does hereby declare
20 November 15, 2021, to be Rita Semel Day in San Francisco.

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