

BY: Senator HELMING

COMMEMORATING the 110th Anniversary of the Ontario
Fire Company on April 21, 2017

WHEREAS, This Legislative Body is proud to commemorate the 110th Anniversary of the Ontario Fire Company and to honor its past and present firefighting members for 110 years of fire protection to the citizens of Ontario, New York, and its surrounding communities; and

WHEREAS, This auspicious milestone will be celebrated at the Ontario Fire Company's Annual Banquet on Friday, April 21, 2017, at the Webster Golf Club in Webster, New York; and

WHEREAS, In 1885, a terrible fire on Main Street nearly destroyed the business district of Ontario, New York; the villagers realized they needed their own organized fire-fighting unit; and

WHEREAS, In 1907, Supervisor Chauncey C. Norton presented a resolution to the Wayne County Board of Supervisors to establish a fire district in the unincorporated village of Ontario; the resolution was accepted and the first recorded information was dated on January 2, 1909; and

WHEREAS, The first Chief of the new fire company was Ira Norton; in 1911, Walter J. Mephram was elected to the position of Fire Chief, and Floyd Risley held the title of Secretary; and

WHEREAS, In those first years, the fire company consisted of local farmers, businessmen and handymen; the men had to organize and find ways to finance the newly founded group; they also had to acquire equipment to fight fires and train the volunteers on how to use it effectively; and

WHEREAS, The forefathers of the Ontario Fire Company used nerves of steel, hand powered pumpers and cisterns of water to put out fires; a wet handkerchief held over their faces served as their clean air supply, and their protective equipment was the coat they happened to wear that day; and

WHEREAS, Fire commissioners, Owen Wooster, Charlie Fewster and Dave Craven spent \$600 on a hand pumper, which was operated by six men on each side, grabbing each rail and furiously raising and lowering it; around 1910, the firemen of the Mutual Fire Company, presently the Ontario Fire Company, purchased a horse drawn motorized pump fire engine for \$1800; and

WHEREAS, One Saturday afternoon, the Fire Commissioners and the Mutual Fire Company decided to have a contest between the two pieces of fire equipment in front of the old hotel on Main Street; the motorized fire engine was easily beating the hand pumper when all of a sudden the engine blew up and the contest ended; and

WHEREAS, By 1914, the bylaws were completed and the Ontario Mutual Fire Company was designated the official fire department serving the Ontario Fire District; and

WHEREAS, In 1924, the Ontario Fire Company decided to host its own Field Days to raise money to support the fire company; the first Field Days were held at Craven's Farm, which is where the Elementary School now stands; and

WHEREAS, The Field Days eventually moved to where the golf course property is today and were known as the biggest little day of Western New York, second only to the New York State Fair; the Ontario Entertainment Management (OEM) corporation was formed to handle the profits from the events, and the money was used to build fire stations and buy fire trucks and other equipment; and

WHEREAS, Also in 1924, the Ontario Center firemen were invited to join the Ontario Fire Company; the following year, the Ontario Village firemen bought a 500-gallon Foamite-Childs fire engine and they sent the hand drawn motorized pumper to the Ontario Center Station; and

WHEREAS, In 1927, a 300-gallon Foamite-Childs fire engine was donated to the Ontario Center station by the OEM; in 1937, the OEM constructed a new Ontario Center Station next to the current Ontario Center Post Office; and

WHEREAS, In 1932, the fire equipment was moved to the former Bartle Vest factory on Ridge Road East and was kept there until 1940; the equipment was then moved to a new station which was built by the OEM; and

WHEREAS, After a resident was electrocuted, the Ontario Fire Company purchased an inhalator; by the mid-1950s, the firemen were called out 50 to 75 times a year for inhalator service; and

WHEREAS, In 1952, a group of firemen formed The Wildcats tournament team, which traveled to several counties to practice different firefighting skills; they raised money to buy a tournament truck and provided labor to expand the Ontario Center Station; and

WHEREAS, In that same year the Ontario Fire Company Ladies Auxiliary was formed to provide food and refreshments for the firemen, not only at fires, but also at the tournaments; today, the group is still very active, and raise a great deal of money for many charitable causes; and

WHEREAS, In 1970, a large multi-bay facility was constructed on Ridge Road, and in 1971, all the trucks from both Ontario and Ontario Center were put in one station; as more and taller trucks were added to the fleet, the station was remodeled in 1999, and re-dedicated in 2000; and

WHEREAS, Over the years, the role of the firemen changed from just fighting fires to providing auto extrication, ice water rescue and fire prevention education; in the 1970s, women began to join the fire

service; and

WHEREAS, Fire departments are an integral part of community protection services in every locality of our State; during the past 110 years, the courageous and devoted firefighters of the Ontario Fire Company have valiantly responded to all types of fire emergencies and have won the praise and respect of the community which they serve; and

WHEREAS, With a membership of dedicated firefighters, the record of the Ontario Fire Company in public service and fire protection is one to be envied; for 24 hours a day, for 365 days a year, for 110 years, whenever the alarm sounded, these noble volunteers left their homes and went to the aid of their neighbors; and

WHEREAS, The brave firefighters of the Ontario Fire Company are prepared to risk their lives every day to help save the lives of others and to protect homes and property from the destruction caused by fire; and

WHEREAS, In addition to the skill and devoted service demonstrated by individual firefighters, the Ontario Fire Company reflects the history and development of firefighting over the past 110 years; and

WHEREAS, This Legislative Body cannot express sufficient gratitude to those devoted individuals who recognize that the preservation of life and property is a sacred responsibility and who make that responsibility their own by serving as firefighters; and

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body that we should give special recognition to those who work so assiduously for the betterment of their communities, and acknowledge publicly the heroic good works performed by the volunteer fire departments of this great Empire State, their officers and auxiliaries; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to proudly commemorate the 110th Anniversary of the Ontario Fire Company on April 21, 2017; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to Kevin Halstead, Chief, Ontario Fire Company.