

BY: Senator GRIFFO

COMMEMORATING the 130th Anniversary of the Rome
Fire Department

WHEREAS, This Legislative Body is proud to commemorate the 130th Anniversary of the Rome Fire Department and to honor its past and present firefighting members for 130 years of fire protection to the citizens of Rome, New York, and its surrounding communities; and

WHEREAS, Fire departments are an integral part of community protection services in every locality of our State; during the past 130 years, the courageous and devoted firefighters of the Rome Fire Department have valiantly responded to all types of fire emergencies and have won the praise and respect of the community which they serve; and

WHEREAS, In the mid-1840s, volunteers used buckets and hand-pumped horse-drawn machines to fight fires; however, after several disastrous blazes claimed whole city blocks, two opera houses, and the Court House between 1848 and 1884, officials gradually added men and machinery to the firefighting arsenal; and

WHEREAS, Shortly after a major fire in 1866 claimed the city's Elm Row area downtown, killing one volunteer, a steamer was ordered from a company in Rhode Island, replacing an 1825 hand engine; the following years, a second one was obtained; and

WHEREAS, When needed, the steamers were filled with water from the canals, creeks and the Mohawk River, and sometimes even cisterns; unfortunately, owners of buildings and homes far away from those water sources were often out of luck; in 1872, a new water source was developed, from the city's Water Works on the banks of the Mohawk River at Ridge Mills, and was piped to hydrants in the city center; and

WHEREAS, Ten years later, the city installed a fire alarm street box system; when a fire was spotted, a citizen would run to one of 23 boxes around the city and pull the alarm, triggering a steam whistle at the Rome Gas & Electric Plant on South Madison Street, which directed firefighters to the location of the fire; and

WHEREAS, By 1890, the city's population had grown to 14,991, the Black River and Erie canals bustled with business, 30 trains per day stopped in the city, and large and small businesses were booming; and

WHEREAS, The Rome Fire Department officially got its start in 1891, with the appointment of the first chief engineer, Andrew Brickner, who was a seasoned volunteer, firefighter and foreman; other paid members included four drivers, two stokers and two engineers; they worked six days a week, and were allowed to go home for meals three times a day, walking, bicycling or riding the trolley; and

WHEREAS, At that time, there were three fire stations, No. 1 at 216

N. Washington Street, No. 2 at 113 E. Liberty Street, and No. 3 at 316 S. George Street; when an alarm sounded, a man at the desk "tripped open" the horse stalls, harnesses were released from overhead and the horses galloped to the scene of the fire; and

WHEREAS, In 1895, a huge bell was placed on top of City Hall, 207-213 N. James Street which tolled out the box number of fires, to direct resources to the neighborhood; and

WHEREAS, In 1915, Hose No. 1, an American LaFrance, was put in service at the North Washington Street station, and one week later, the first motorized pumping engine arrived, and was named Engine No. 2, and assigned to the East Liberty Street station; and

WHEREAS, The horses were gradually put out to pasture, and the firefighters' hours were reduced to four days on, one day off; in 1929, they were further reduced to 84 per week; and

WHEREAS, By 1924, all the first response apparatus was motorized, with the purchase of a new American LaFrance ladder truck; and

WHEREAS, After a fire badly damaged Rome Free Academy on Turin Street in 1938, the department acquired a 75-foot tractor-drawn Seagrave aerial ladder truck; and

WHEREAS, During the 1940s, two Ward LaFrance pumpers were purchased and firefighters' hours were reduced to 72 per week, and since then, there have been gradual reductions to 40 hours per week; and

WHEREAS, Since the original No. 3 station had been closed in 1919, a new one was opened at 725 Black River Boulevard in 1952, and the No. 1 station moved to 1004 Laurel Street in 1965; and

WHEREAS, In the 1970s, No. 2 and No. 3 stations closed, and its personnel moved to the new station at 158 Black River Boulevard, and the number of box alarms had grown to 245, however, due to a growing number of false alarms, some were removed the following year; and

WHEREAS, Smoke detectors were mandated in the city, in multi-family homes in 1984, and by 1991, there were 172 box alarms left, department personnel numbered 99, and the firefighters used 125 tools; and

WHEREAS, As the department has grown, so has its requirements and duties; firefighters are required to be trained emergency medical technicians, and they must be able to find on their rigs and know how to use, even in the dark, numerous tools; and

WHEREAS, Firefighters also continually attend courses, wear fire- and heat-resistant clothing, carry self-contained breathing apparatus, conduct regular fire safety programs and others, and are responsible for inspections at schools, hospitals, factories and businesses, making sure they meet fire codes; and

WHEREAS, With a membership of dedicated firefighters, the record of

the Rome Fire Department in public service and fire protection is one to be envied; for 24 hours a day, for 365 days a year, for 130 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 Rome Fire Department 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 Rome Fire Department reflects the history and development of firefighting over the past 130 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 130th Anniversary of the Rome Fire Department; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the Rome Fire Department.