

Assembly Resolution No. 841

BY: M. of A. Buttenschon

MOURNING the death of Herbert Clifton Thorpe,
distinguished citizen and devoted member of his
community

WHEREAS, It is the custom of this Legislative Body to pay tribute to citizens of the State of New York whose lifework and civic endeavor served to enhance the quality of life in their communities and this great Empire State; and

WHEREAS, Herbert Clifton Thorpe of Rome, New York, died on January 28, 2024, at the age of 101; and

WHEREAS, On January 9, 1923, Herbert Clifton Thorpe was born the second of six children to Barbadian immigrants Denzil C. Thorpe and Dorine E. (Chandler) Thorpe in Brooklyn, New York; he graduated from Alexander Hamilton High School (now Paul Robeson Technical School) and enrolled in the Civilian Conservation Corps, working as a clerk typist in Van Etten and Camden, New York; he also worked as an automotive mechanic in Beltsville, Maryland, prior to enlisting in the United States Army Reserves in October of 1942; and

WHEREAS, That December, Herbert Clifton Thorpe enrolled in the United States Signal Corps School in Troy, New York; the following June, he began his basic training for the Air Force at Kearns Field near Salt Lake City, Utah; and

WHEREAS, Following his basic training, Herbert Clifton Thorpe was accepted to cadet school; in early 1944, he traveled to Keesler Field in Biloxi, Mississippi, where he passed the Tuskegee Airman aptitude test, taking him to Tuskegee Institute in Alabama for the first phase of pilot training, learning how to operate the PT-17 single-engine bi-planes; and

WHEREAS, From Alabama, Herbert Clifton Thorpe was sent to gunnery school in Florida, returned to Tuskegee Institute, and moved on to Texas where he obtained additional navigator/bombardier training at Midland Airfield; following that instruction, he completed advanced flying training, qualifying as a B-25 pilot, at Tuskegee Army Airfield; he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant Navigator/Bombardier on December 30, 1944; and

WHEREAS, After an honorable discharge in the summer of 1946, Herbert Clifton Thorpe returned to Brooklyn where he worked for the Veterans Administration and the United States Postal Service prior to enrolling in New York University under the G.I. Bill, earning his Bachelor of Electronic Engineering degree in 1953, and was employed as a radar engineer at the Brooklyn Navy Yard; and

WHEREAS, In 1959, Herbert Clifton Thorpe moved from Brooklyn with his wife and two children to start his new employment in the radar research department at Griffiss Air Force Base in Rome, New York, where

he retired in 1983; the following year, he started a new position as a part-time guidance counselor at Mohawk Valley Community College until 1996; and

WHEREAS, As a prominent member of the Rome community, Herbert Clifton Thorpe assisted in chartering the Rome Branch of NAACP, serving as its first Secretary and holding the position of President for 10 years; he was also a Charter Member, Past President, and Past Secretary of the Mohawk Valley Club of Frontiers International, a Charter Member and Secretary of Prince Hall Military Lodge No. 112, and a Past Member of the advisory board for the Oneida County Office of the Aging; and

WHEREAS, Herbert Clifton Thorpe and his wife, Jessie, were Fresh Air Fund "parents" for many years and active members of the First Presbyterian Church of Rome for more than 50 years; they helped establish the Afro-American Heritage Association in Rome; and

WHEREAS, Active in his community, Herbert Clifton Thorpe was a member of the Claude Tuskegee Airmen, Incorporated (TAI), Claude B. Govan, Tri-State Chapter, New York; he was an avid golfer in his spare time; and

WHEREAS, Herbert Clifton Thorpe was the recipient of several honors, including the first New York State Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Humanitarian Award (2012), the Rome Historical Society 1777 Medal of Honor Award (2013), and the dedication of the Heritage Room on Griffiss Air Force Base in his name in July of 2023; and

WHEREAS, Herbert Clifton Thorpe is survived by his son, Clifton Thorpe (Vanessa); daughter, Jessica Thorpe; grandchildren, Maisha Sebastiany (Lee), Stephanie Thorpe, Natalie Thorpe, Leslie Stark (Kalib), and Kahlil Davis; and great-grandchildren, Gibran Pierce, Azariah Sebastiany, Khepri Davis, Westin Stark, and Nyla Stark; he is predeceased by his wife of 69 years, Jessie M. (Shorts) Thorpe; and

WHEREAS, Armed with a humanistic spirit and imbued with a sense of compassion, Herbert Clifton Thorpe leaves behind a legacy which will long endure the passage of time and will remain as a comforting memory to all he served and befriended; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to mourn the death of Herbert Clifton Thorpe, distinguished citizen and devoted member of his community; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the family of Herbert Clifton Thorpe.