

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION paying tribute to the life and accomplishments of Dr. Clara Ambrus, distinguished physician, professor and humanitarian

WHEREAS, From time to time this Legislative Body takes note of certain extraordinary individuals it wishes to recognize for their valued contributions to the success and progress of society and publicly acknowledges their endeavors which have enhanced the basic humanity among us all; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is justly proud to remember Dr. Clara Ambrus, distinguished physician, professor, humanitarian and Righteous Among the Nations, who passed away in Buffalo, New York, where she had made her home for many years, on February 26, 2011 at the age of 86; and

WHEREAS, It is said that "He who saves one human being is as if he saves an entire world"; and

WHEREAS, In 1963, Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, embarked upon a worldwide project to grant the title of Righteous Among the Nations, embodying this belief, to those not of the Jewish faith who acted according to the most noble principles of humanity, risking their lives to help Jews during the Holocaust; and

WHEREAS, On August 18, 2006, the Israeli government, using set criteria and extensive documentation, bestowed the revered title of Righteous Among the Nations upon Buffalo resident, Clara Ambrus, nee Baer, only the fifth American to be so honored, in recognition of her lifesaving efforts more than six decades ago, an honor she truly merits and one which includes family members who shared in the rescue of Jews; and

WHEREAS, Oskar Schindler had his list; Clara Ambrus and her family had their home in Budapest, and a nearby vacant textile factory; and

WHEREAS, While her husband Julian Ambrus served as a member of the Hungarian Resistance, Clara Ambrus and the Baer family provided a safe haven for Jews hiding from the Nazis, just as the German industrialist had, sheltering and saving the lives of at least 50, including Rabbi Bela Eisenberg, the future Chief Rabbi of Vienna, but estimated to more likely be several hundred Jewish and non-Jewish lives saved as a result of their efforts; and

WHEREAS, Born in Rome, where her father, an architect, was part of the Hungarian Diplomatic Mission, on December 28, 1924, Clara Ambrus was just 19 and in her first year of medical school when the Germans invaded Budapest in 1944, Clara and her family turned their home into a refuge and provided elaborate hideouts in the factory once managed by her parents; anybody who rang the bell got a place; and

WHEREAS, Their discovery would have meant certain death for those being sheltered and for Clara Ambrus and her family; whenever German soldiers came to the door, she told them they had to wait until she tied up the family's vicious dogs, though they weren't vicious at all, giving everyone time to hide; and

WHEREAS, Very much involved with these efforts, Clara Ambrus' father, Anthony Baer, was severely beaten when he was found to be carrying home a suspiciously large amount of food, the injuries he suffered costing him his life several years later; and

WHEREAS, Clara and her husband, Julian Ambrus, met at the University of Budapest, where they had both begun their medical studies, and married early in 1944, before the invasion of Hungary; and

WHEREAS, As a member of the Hungarian Resistance movement, Julian Ambrus helped stage attacks against both German and Soviet invaders;

when the Soviets tightened their grip on Hungary in 1945, he was sent to a Soviet prisoner-of-war camp, from which very few survived; and

WHEREAS, Julian Ambrus was able to use his medical training, though limited at the time, to befriend a Russian doctor who warned him the Soviets were coming the next day to move the prisoners to a Siberian gulag; desperate, that night he dug a tunnel under the barbed wired enclosure and, as he poked his head through the surface on the other side, he was surprised and grateful to see the Russian doctor distracting the watchtower guards, keeping the machine guns silent and enabling him to make his escape; and

WHEREAS, World War II ended soon thereafter and Clara and Julian were able to resume their studies, first in Budapest, then earning their medical degrees at the University of Zurich in Switzerland, after which they joined the staff of the Pasteur Institute in Paris; and

WHEREAS, They came to the United States in 1950 and to Buffalo's Roswell Park Cancer Institute in 1955, where they have raised their family, had distinguished research careers, became well-known throughout Western New York for their contributions to medicine as well as their humanitarian efforts and continued to help others, including during the chaos of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, managing to secure jobs here for as many as 50 Hungarians, and since that time, through their research and in so many other ways in their adopted country; and

WHEREAS, Clara Ambrus also completed graduate studies at Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia and was a prominent physician and a longtime professor of pediatrics and obstetrics and gynecology at the State University of New York at Buffalo; she earned numerous honors and awards, including the Hauptman-Woodward Medical Research Institute's George F. Koepf Award for the advancement of biomedical research; she was declared a Foreign Member of the National Academy of Science in Hungary, was named by the Pope as a Lady Commander of the order of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem, and in 2008, was honored with the Anti-Defamation League's prestigious Courage to Care Award; and

WHEREAS, Julian Ambrus, also 86, is a retired Roswell Park Cancer Institute Researcher and SUNY Buffalo Medical School professor who continues to work as a researcher at Buffalo General Hospital; and

WHEREAS, In addition to her beloved husband of 67 years, Dr. Julian L. Ambrus, Sr., Clara Ambrus is survived by her children Dr. Madeline and her husband Dr. David Lillie, Dr. Peter and his wife Claudia Ambrus, Dr. Julian L. and his wife Sarah Ambrus, Jr., Linda A. and her husband Edward Broenniman, Steven Ambrus, Katherine A. and her husband Thomas Cheney, and Charles Ambrus; her treasured grandchildren Christine, Sarah and Karen Lillie; Melissa Ambrus; Peter Ambrus, Jr.; Alexander and Christopher Cheney and Courtney Ambrus; her dear brother Ivan Kawai; several nieces and nephews and a legion of colleagues, friends and admirers who will long cherish her memory; and

WHEREAS, Clara Ambrus exemplified the preservation of human values during the darkest period in the civilization of mankind; she will forever be a shining example of humanity at its very best and bravest and an enduring source of hope and inspiration; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberation to celebrate the vital spirit of courage, bravery and beauty personified by Clara Ambrus and to pay grateful tribute to her life and accomplishments; and be it further

RESOLVED, That copies of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to Yad Vashem and to Julian Ambrus and the Ambrus family with the deepest condolences and greatest admiration of this Legislative Body.