

BY: M. of A. Barclay

COMMEMORATING the 75th Anniversary of the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter in Oswego, New York

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to recognize the efforts of those organizations that seek to illuminate historical time periods, places and events within the State of New York and, in so doing, help to ensure that the complete history of our State and Nation is preserved, to be shared with present and future generations of citizens; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is justly proud to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter in Oswego, New York; and

WHEREAS, On Monday, August 5, 2019, the Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum, Fort Ontario State Historic Site, Friends of Fort Ontario and the greater community will celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the arrival of the 982 World War II refugees who came to Oswego and were given shelter at Fort Ontario; and

WHEREAS, Attending the 75th Anniversary Commemoration Ceremony will be former refugees of the Holocaust, their families, religious leaders, Jewish groups, historians, public officials, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum Curator and Historian Rebecca Erbelding, Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum President Kevin Hill, and others; and

WHEREAS, President Franklin D. Roosevelt announced his proposal to create an emergency shelter at Fort Ontario for victims of the Holocaust and war refugees on June 12, 1944; this was the first and only refugee center established in the United States during World War II; and

WHEREAS, To carry out President Franklin D. Roosevelt's order, Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes, sent Special Assistant Ruth Gruber to Italy to bring back war refugees to the United States; it took over two weeks to cross the rough Atlantic Ocean, however, according to documented accounts from the refugees, the hardship of the journey was well worth the wait when the refugees first caught glimpse of the Statue of Liberty; and

WHEREAS, In the early morning of August 5, 1944, the 982 men, women and children from war torn Europe arrived at Fort Ontario in Oswego; and

WHEREAS, The 982 refugees were from 18 different countries in Central Europe that were liberated from the Nazis; most of the refugees were Jewish and priority was given to those refugees who were in concentration camps and had escaped or who lost relatives in the Holocaust; and

WHEREAS, 'Fort Ontario is where the Holocaust came to America' and where Americans first encountered the persecution and horrors of the Nazis through the victim's eyes; and

WHEREAS, Due to their undefined immigration status, refugees were not allowed to leave Fort Ontario, however, the Oswego Community welcomed these guests; over time, children were allowed to attend schools and the refugees were permitted daily access into the City of Oswego; and

WHEREAS, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt visited the refugees at the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter on September 20, 1944; and

WHEREAS, Advocates for the refugees at Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Center petitioned Congress and the President to grant the refugees immigration status; their persistence paid off as President Harry Truman signed an Executive Order allowing the refugees to remain in the country; and

WHEREAS, In January and February of 1946, the refugees made the historic trip across to Canada and back into the United States to receive their immigration visas; and

WHEREAS, The stories of these 982 men, women and children is a story of tragedy, suffering and the will of the human spirit; it is an important piece of our history that should be retold for generations to come and never forgotten; and

WHEREAS, In 1989, the Save Haven, Inc. was founded with the mission of honoring and keeping alive the story of these brave 982 refugees who survived the terror of the Nazi reign during World War II; on October 6, 2002, the Safe Haven Museum and Education Center was dedicated in the former Administration Building for the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Center; and

WHEREAS, The quality and character of our great Empire State is greatly enhanced by institutions that engage communities in the exploration of New York's history and culture, instilling in them a deep appreciation for the richness and breadth of our cultural heritage; and

WHEREAS, This Legislative Body is pleased to have this opportunity to express its highest admiration for the Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum, Fort Ontario State Historic Site, Friends of Fort Ontario and for all of the individuals who have worked to bring proper attention to a place and time which merits recognition in the grand panorama of the history of our State and Nation; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter in Oswego, New York; and be it further

RESOLVED, That copies of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum, Fort

Ontario State Historic Site, and Friends of Fort Ontario.