

BY: Senator HELMING

HONORING Valerie Knoblauch upon the occasion of her retirement after 41 years of distinguished service to Ontario County as Director of Tourism on May 31, 2025

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to acknowledge those individuals whose professional lives and civic endeavors serve to enhance the stature of the State of New York; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and in full accord with its longstanding traditions, this Legislative Body is justly proud to honor Valerie Knoblauch upon the occasion of her retirement on May 31, 2025, after 41 years of distinguished service to Ontario County as Director of Tourism, more commonly known to the community as President & CEO of Finger Lakes Visitors Connection; and

WHEREAS, For the past 41 years, Valerie Knoblauch has rendered faithful and valuable service to the community, devoting her entire career to promoting and growing the tourism industry in Ontario County and advancing the Finger Lakes as a premier tourism destination, supporting local businesses, jobs, and cultural offerings; and

WHEREAS, Valerie Knoblauch was hired as the first director of tourism for Ontario County in 1984, bringing a love of the wine and travel industries to the position, stemming in part from her previous experience at Gold Seal Vineyards in Hammondsport, New York; and

WHEREAS, Throughout her career, Valerie Knoblauch established herself as a respected leader in tourism at the local, state, and national levels; she has held numerous leadership roles, including serving as a member of the Governor's Tourism Advisory Council for New York State, chairing both the New York State Tourism Promotion Agency Council and the New York State Travel and Vacation Association-prior to their merger into the New York State Tourism Industry Association-and leading the Finger Lakes Regional Tourism Council as its chair; and

WHEREAS, Nationally, Valerie Knoblauch served as a board member of US Travel - Travel Industry Association of America and as founding chair of US Travel's National Council of Destination Organizations; and

WHEREAS, Valerie Knoblauch further served in various other capacities, including as a New York Delegate to the White House Conference on Travel and Tourism, and as a founding board member of Women in Travel and Tourism; and

WHEREAS, Valerie Knoblauch has been a featured speaker nationally on strategic planning, destination management, tourism as economic development, community partnerships, and innovative marketing; and

WHEREAS, Due in large part to Valerie Knoblauch's contributions and

achievements, in 2023, traveler spending in Ontario County grew by nearly 12 percent over the prior year-the second largest growth in the Finger Lakes region-resulting in an economic impact of \$341 million; and

WHEREAS, Valerie Knoblauch's influence extends to mentoring over 100 rising travel and tourism professionals over her career, cultivating the next generation of leaders in the tourism and hospitality industry, and holding adjunct faculty positions at Rochester Institute of Technology Graduate School of Hospitality and Finger Lakes Community College; and

WHEREAS, Her community involvement reached beyond tourism as Valerie Knoblauch was a longtime member of the Board of Education of the Canandaigua City School District, the Finger Lakes Community College Foundation Board of Directors, and the F.F. Thompson Health System Continuing Care Center Board of Directors; and

WHEREAS, Among the many honors she has received throughout her career, Valerie Knoblauch is a recipient of the esteemed 2023 New York State Tourism Industry Association Excellence in Leadership Career and Lifetime Achievement Award and the esteemed ATHENA Leadership Award from the Canandaigua Chamber of Commerce; and

WHEREAS, Valerie Knoblauch received a Bachelor of Science degree in English Education from the State University of New York at Oswego, a Master of Business Administration degree from the Rochester Institute of Technology, and a Certified Tour Professional (CTP) designation from the National Tour Association; and

WHEREAS, In her well-deserved retirement, Valerie Knoblauch looks forward to traveling with her husband, Kurt, especially to visit their three sons and six grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, Valerie Knoblauch's innumerable contributions over her distinguished career have had a profound impact on growing the tourism industry, enhancing the visitor experience, and improving the economic vitality and quality of life in Ontario County; and

WHEREAS, Her enduring leadership and commitment have earned Valerie Knoblauch the respect and admiration of her colleagues and peers, locally, regionally, and statewide; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to honor Valerie Knoblauch upon the occasion of her retirement after 41 years of distinguished service on May 31, 2025; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to Valerie Knoblauch.