

2013-J3566

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION honoring retired long distance swimmer Marilyn Bell Di Lascio upon the occasion of the 60th Anniversary of her historic swim across Lake Ontario

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to recognize those citizens who, through a lifetime of impressive achievement, are a profound inspiration to all the citizens of our Empire State; and

WHEREAS, It is also the custom of this Legislative Body to acknowledge those pioneering athletes who, through their courage, dedication, and exceptional performance, blaze a trail for others to follow; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is justly proud to honor retired long distance swimmer Marilyn Bell Di Lascio upon the occasion of the 60th Anniversary of her historic swim across Lake Ontario, which took place September 8-9, 1954; and

WHEREAS, Currently a resident of New Paltz, New York, Marilyn Bell Di Lascio was born in the city of Toronto, in Ontario, Canada, on October 19, 1937, to Sydney and Grace Bell; and

WHEREAS, On September 9, 1954, at the age of 16, Marilyn Bell became the first person to swim across Lake Ontario, swimming 32 miles from Youngstown, New York, to Toronto, Canada; and

WHEREAS, Marilyn Bell first took up swimming when she was nine years old; in 1947 she entered her first long-distance race: a one-mile swim at the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE) in Lake Ontario, where she first met her future coach, Gus Ryder; and

WHEREAS, At the beginning of her swimming career Marilyn Bell did not look like a champion, usually placing fourth or fifth in swimming competitions; however, she possessed great physical endurance and tremendous will and, when she began working with Gus Ryder, her unparalleled deter-

mination began to pay off; and

WHEREAS, Marilyn Bell trained in hopes of making the 1952 Olympic games in Finland but was unsuccessful; at age 14 she turned professional, swimming in women's and general races, including a 26-mile race around Absecon Island in Atlantic City, New Jersey in which, out of 39 swimmers, she was one of only seven who survived the marathon; and

WHEREAS, When a challenge went out for a marathon swimmer to cross Lake Ontario, Marilyn Bell responded; the CNE in Toronto had offered a world famous American long-distance swimmer \$10,000 to swim the lake as a publicity effort, but Marilyn Bell decided to take on the challenge without pay; and

WHEREAS, On the night of September 8, 1954, Marilyn Bell started her swim across Lake Ontario at approximately the same time as the famous swimmer; after several hours the celebrity was forced to give up with stomach pains and vomiting, but 16-year-old Marilyn Bell completed her swim; she was the first person ever to cover the entire distance when she reached Toronto the next day; and

WHEREAS, Marilyn Bell swam for 20 hours and 59 minutes under grueling conditions before she finally reached a breakwater west of the CNE grounds; the planned 32-mile route was straight across the lake, but the intrepid athlete had to swim much further due to strong winds and the lack of modern navigation equipment; the waves that day were up to fifteen feet high, the water temperature was 65 degrees Fahrenheit, and lamprey eels were attacking her legs and arms; and

WHEREAS, During the contest Marilyn Bell kept up her strength with Pabulum, corn syrup, and lemon juice with water, as well as with heroic encouragement from her boat crew, friends and her coach; when she final-

ly arrived at about 8:15 p.m., a crowd of 300,000 people gave her an emotional welcome at the Sunnyside Waterfront; and

WHEREAS, Marilyn Bell continued to amaze her countrymen and the world; in 1955, at age 17, she became the youngest person to swim the English

Channel and, in 1956, she swam the Strait of Juan de Fuca off the Pacific coast; later that year she officially retired from professional swimming; and

WHEREAS, After her swimming career, Marilyn Bell married the late Joe Di Lascio, a lifeguard she met at her marathon swim in Atlantic City; she left Canada and moved to New Jersey, where she and her husband raised four children: Lisa, Michael, Jodi, and Janet; and

WHEREAS, Marilyn Bell Di Lascio became a teacher, enjoying a 20-year career teaching preschool, second and third grades, along with special education classes; and

WHEREAS, She currently resides at Woodland Pond retirement community in New Paltz, near her children and grandchildren; to this day water still holds magic for Marilyn Bell Di Lascio who continues to enjoy swimming; and

WHEREAS, In 1954, Marilyn Bell Di Lascio was named the Canadian Newsmaker of the Year by the Canadian Press, was awarded the Lou Marsh Trophy as Canada's athlete of the year, as well as the Bobbie Rosenfeld Award as Canadian female athlete of the year, and in 1958, she was inducted into Canada's Sports Hall of Fame; in 1993 she entered the Canadian Swimming Hall of Fame and was named one of Canada's top athletes of the century; in 2002 she was presented with the Order of Ontario; and

WHEREAS, Marilyn Bell Di Lascio's unprecedented successful swim across Lake Ontario has fired the imaginations of generations; 56 swimmers have since made the journey, many of them women, including the youngest of them, a 14-year-old girl in 2012; and

WHEREAS, Marilyn Bell Di Lascio is a true pioneer and role model in the sport of long distance swimming; her character and achievements stand as a sterling example and inspiration to all who would aspire to success; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to honor retired long distance swimmer Marilyn Bell Di Lascio upon the

occasion of the 60th Anniversary of her historic swim across Lake Ontario; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to Marilyn Bell Di Lascio.