

Senate Resolution No. 1009

BY: Senator DUANE

COMMEMORATING the 100th Anniversary of the
Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire on March 25, 2011

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire on March 25, 2011; and

WHEREAS, On Friday, March 25, 2011, at 4:00 p.m., a special memorial ceremony, including an Exhibit and a Legislative Resolution honoring the memory of those who were lost, will be held by the New York State Commissioner of Labor, Colleen Crawford Gardner, and the New York State Senate commemorating the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, following in the footsteps of Former Labor Commissioner Frances Perkins who said, "They did not die in vain and we will not forget them."; and

WHEREAS, It is the further intent of this Legislative Body to recognize the ongoing efforts of UNITE HERE, the Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees, in striving to make working conditions for the American people the safest in the world; and

WHEREAS, Each year, UNITE HERE, together with the New York City Fire Department, commemorates the anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire at the original site of the tragedy with a wreath and speeches, and members of Ladder Company 20, the first to respond to the fire, toll their bell and raise their ladder to the sixth floor; this year the ceremony will take place on Friday, March 25, 2011, at the corner of Washington Place and Greene Street; and

WHEREAS, With the terrible attack on our Nation of September 11, 2001, still so painfully fresh in our hearts and minds, it is more important than ever that we reflect on the strength and heritage of our great country; we owe a debt of gratitude and remembrance to our immigrant forebears and, while the Triangle toll was a grievous wound for our Jewish and Italian grandparents and ancestors, all should join together to record, remember and memorialize the sacrifices and courage of all the immigrants who built this nation so that their children and descendants would reap the rewards of their achievements and enjoy the benefits of life and liberty in America, the greatest country in the world; and

WHEREAS, At the turn of the century, urban working conditions in the United States were appalling; no place else were these conditions more deplorable than in New York's garment industry; here, young women, mostly recent immigrants, toiled from dawn to dusk; in the winter of 1909, a strike was organized; the Union believed that if it could get 3,000 workers to go out on strike, the strike would be successful; amazingly, 20,000 women, including workers from the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, joined the strike, but despite their courageous efforts, the conditions did not improve; and

WHEREAS, The shirtwaist was the uniform of the new woman; the first women to go out to work as "typewriters" wore it; so did the "Gibson Girls" that Charles Dana Gibson drew playing golf or croquet; it was the

first civilian garment simple and loosely fitted enough to be made in factories by the dozens, instead of custom-made one at a time by dressmakers or tailors; and

WHEREAS, By the early 1890s, shirtwaists were being made in modern factories, at long rows of sewing machines powered by electricity; Max Blanck and Isaac Harris, owners of the million-dollar Triangle Shirtwaist Co., with operations in New York and Philadelphia, were "the shirtwaist kings"; their biggest factory occupied the top three floors of a new, fireproof building, a block from Washington Square in New York and employed approximately 600 people; and

WHEREAS, The employees were putting on their hats and coats at quitting time on Saturday, March 25, 1911, when someone noticed smoke curling from the long rag bin under the cutting tables along the windows on the eighth floor; the month's accumulation of linen and muslin scraps caught fire, then the fabric that was laid out on the tables, then the paper patterns strung open on the wire about them, then the big wicker baskets full of bundled work that stood by each sewing machine; and

WHEREAS, There were no sprinklers; only three weeks before, an association of property owners had met to oppose the fire department's campaign to require them; and

WHEREAS, In the Triangle Fire, all but one of the terrified seamstresses and cutters on the eighth floor escaped, whether by one of the two small elevators or down one of the building's two narrow stairways, each wide enough for only one person to descend at a time; somebody telephoned a warning to the executives on the 10th floor, where the fire quickly spread, and many from the offices and the pressing and shipping rooms on the 10th floor, including the shirtwaist owners themselves, caught an elevator or escaped over the roof; and

WHEREAS, Tragically, nobody told the ninth floor; by the time they knew, they were caught between fires above and below them; some ran for the elevators, others for the doors to the stairs; one set of doors was locked to keep girls from leaving early; the doors to the other stairway opened inward, and almost immediately the terrified crush made it impossible to open them; soon the stairs were cut off by the fire; and

WHEREAS, The elevator operators did their best, each making seven or eight trips through smoke and flames, but as the fire grew, it forced one after another of the desperate waiting crowds of girls and young women to leap into the open shaft, until finally the elevators could not rise because they were jammed by bodies; and

WHEREAS, The rest of the ninth-floor workers were forced to the windows; they stood on the ledges as long as they could, waiting for the fire ladders, but the city's longest ladder reached only to the sixth floor, and as the fire reached out the windows after them, they began to jump, many holding hands, to their deaths on the sidewalks and fences below; and

WHEREAS, The date March 25th holds a special significance for all working people because of this tragic Triangle Shirtwaist Company Fire in New York City that took the lives of 146 garment workers, a tragedy

that occurred on March 25, 1911; and

WHEREAS, Research has determined that the majority of the tragic victims were Jewish and Italian immigrants; and

WHEREAS, Among those lost were many sisters, mothers, daughters and family groups, including Mrs. Caterina Maltese, and her daughters, Lucia and Rosaria; and

WHEREAS, Recent research has determined the names and ages of the handful of previously unidentified victims; and

WHEREAS, The complete list now includes: Lizzie Adler (24 years old), Anna Altman (16), Annina Ardito (25), Rose Bassino (31, sister of Catherine Giarmattasio), Vincenza Benanti (22), Yetta Berger (18), Essie Bernstein (19), Jacob Bernstein (38), Morris Bernstein (19), Gussie Bierman (22), Vincenza Billota (16), Abraham Binowitz (30), Rosie Brenman (23, sister of Sarah Brenman), Sarah Brenman (17), Ida Brodsky (15), Sarah Brodsky (21), Ada Brooks (18), Laura Brunetti (17), Josephine Cammarata (18), Francesca Caputo (17), Josephine Carlisi (31), Albina Caruso (20), Annie Ciminello (36), Rosina Cirrito (18), Anna Cohen (25), Annie Colletti (30), Sarah Cooper (16), Michelina Cordiano (25), Bessie Dashefsky (25), Josie Del Castillo (21), Clara Dockman (19), Kalman Donick (24), Celia Eisenberg (17), Dora Evans (18), Rebecca Feibisch (20), Yetta Fichtenholtz (18), Daisy Lopez Fitze (26), Mary Floresta (26), Max Florin (23), Jenne Franco (16), Rose Friedman (18), Molly Gerstein (17), Catherine Giannattasio (22), Celia Gitlin (17), Esther Goldstein (20), Lena Goldstein (22, sister of Mary Goldstein), Mary Goldstein (18), Yetta Goldstein (20), Rosie Grasso (16), Bertha Greb (25), Diana Gerjuoy (18), Rachel Grossman (18), Mary Herman (40), Esther Hochfeld (21), Fannie Hollander (18), Pauline Horowitz (19), Ida Jukofsky (19), Ida Kanowitz (18), Tessie Kaplan (18), Beckie Kessler (19), Jacob Klein (23), Beckie Koppelman (16), Bertha Kula (19), Tillie Kupferschmidt (16), Benjamin Kurtz (19), Annie L'Abbate (16), Fannie Lansner (21), Maria Giuseppa Lauletta (33, sister of Isabella Tortorelli), Jennie Lederman (21), Max Lehrer (18, brother of Sam Lehrer), Sam Lehrer (19), Kate Leone (14), Mary Leventhal (22), Jennie Levin (19), Pauline Levine (19), Nettie Liebowitz (23), Rose Liermark (19), Bettina Maiale (18, sister of Frances Maiale), Frances Maiale (21), Caterina Maltese (39, mother of Lucia and Rosaria Maltese), Lucia Maltese (20), Rosaria Maltese (14), Maria Manaria (27), Rose Mankofsky (22), Rose Mehl (15), Yetta Meyers (19), Gaetana Midolo (16), Annie Miller (16), Beckie Neubauer (19), Annie Nicholas (18), Michelina Nicolosi (21), Sadie Nussbaum (18), Julia Oberstein (19), Rose Oringer (19), Beckie Ostrovsky (20), Annie Pack (18), Provindenza Panno (43), Antonietta Pasqualicchio (16), Ida Pearl (20), Jennie Pildescu (18), Vincenza Pinelli (30), Emilia Prato (21), Concetta Prestifilippo (18 or 22), Beckie Reines (18), Fannie Rosen (21), Israel Rosen (17, son of Julia Rosen), Julia Rosen (35), Louis/Loeb Rosen (33), Yetta Rosenbaum (22), Jennie Rosenberg (21), Gussie Rosenfeld (22), Nettie Rosenthal (21), Emma Rothstein (22), Theodore Rotner (22), Sarah Sabasowitz (17), Santina Salemi (24), Sarafina Saracino (25), sister of Teresina Saracino), Teresina Saracino (20), Gussie Schiffman (18), Theresa Schmidt (32), Ethel Schneider (20), Violet/Velye Schochet (21), Golda Schpunt (19), Margaret Schwartz (24), Jacob Seltzer (33), Rosie Shapiro (17), Ben Sklover (25), Rose Sorkin (18), Annie Starr (30), Jennie Stein (18), Jennie Stellino (16), Jennie Stiglitz (22), Sam Taback (20),

Clotilde Terranova (22), Isabella Tortorelli (17), Meyer Utal (23), Catherine Uzzo (22), Frieda Velakofsky (20), Bessie Viviano (15), Rosie Weiner (19), Sarah Weintraub (17), Tessie Weisner (21), Dora Welfowitz (21), Bertha Wendorff (18), Joseph Wilson (22) and Sonia Wisotsky (17); and

WHEREAS, This tragedy became the most vivid symbol of the need for workplace safety and spawned the labor movement; the Factory Investigating Commission was formed following the fire to study and make recommendations on working conditions; this marked the beginning of auspicious political careers for both the Chairman, Robert T. Wagner, Sr., who went on to become a U.S. Senator, and its Vice Chairman, Alfred E. Smith, who became New York State Governor; in addition, among the investigating inspectors were Frances Perkins and Rose Schneiderman, women who were pivotal in the history of American labor; the findings of the Commission became the basis for far-reaching safety laws across the nation and forged the New York State Department of Labor; the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire started a movement to fight sweatshops which continues to this day; and

WHEREAS, The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire serves as a sad reminder that worker safety laws are necessary to ensure a safe working place for all Americans; we honor the memory of the 146 immigrant victims of this calamity, and their loved ones, by remaining vigilant to ensure that a similar tragedy never happens again; and

WHEREAS, Upon the occasion of the 100th Anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, it is the sense of this Legislative Body to join with UNITE HERE, the New York State Department of Labor and the New York State Legislature, in commemoration of a tragic event of such meaningful significance to the history and purpose of the American labor movement; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire at a special ceremony to be held on March 25, 2011, and to acknowledge the efforts of UNITE HERE, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo, the Commissioner of Labor, Colleen Crawford Gardner, and the New York State Legislature; and be it further

RESOLVED, That copies of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to John W. Wilhelm, President, UNITE HERE; Robert E. Beloten, Chair of the New York State Workers' Compensation Board; Salvatore J. Cassano, New York City Fire Commissioner; Vincent C. Maltese, Board Chairman, Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire Memorial Society; Serphin Maltese; and New York State Commissioner of Labor, Colleen Crawford Gardner.