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Councilman Gentile Remarks and Photos from Buonvino Street Renaming Ceremony

“I’d like to welcome and thank everyone for joining me today to honor the memory of Bob Buonvino and to thank him, our friend and collaborator, for the years of energy and good work he invested in our neighborhood.

“I’d like to thank CB11 Chair Bill Guarinello, District Manager Marnee Elias-Pavia and Dilia Schack for making honoring Bob through this street renaming a priority. Dilia was as involved as anyone in my office in making sure that all of Bob’s friends and family knew about this ceremony and that this celebration of his life would be honored in the way he lived it – to the fullest, with dignity and as also a celebration of community.

“Bob exemplified the energy, activity and good deeds that make this the sort of community you want to live and raise a family in. He was a true son of the Boy Scouts of America – that’s a group defined by its commitment to community service, and after Bob, as a boy, earned the rank of Eagle Scout in his Borough Park Troop 326, it seemed like his lifelong role of a man who protects and improves his neighborhood was set.

“After high school, Bob extended his community service to a much wider “community” – our country. He enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1958, serving overseas under President Eisenhower. He returned to Brooklyn and dedicated himself to Brooklyn children, serving as Scoutmaster of Troop 326 for nearly two decades. The Order of the Arrow, the Boy Scouts’ national honor society, gave him its highest award. He was honored by and contributed so much to the Boy Scouts of America, and I believe that Arthur Schack, on Troop 20’s behalf, will let you know how much he meant to the Boy Scouts.

“Besides enriching the lives of countless Boy Scouts, Bob worked on the behalf of fellow members in the Carpenter’s Union as a delegate. He was an active veteran, first as a member of the Borough Park Post and later the Amity Post of the American Legion. He was instrumental in organizing Brooklyn’s annual Memorial Day Parade, and also an active member with the

Federation of Italian-American Organizations, serving as the Grand Marshal of the Columbus Day Parade on 18th Avenue. He was well-known and deeply involved in his parish, Regina Pacis-Santa Rosalia, serving as an usher and on its Neighborhood Improvement Association. Bob was on Community Board 10 for almost 5 years, and served on both its Police and Public Safety Committee and Youth Committee, and Chaired the nominating committee in 2007 and 2008. Bob was a great supporter of NIA – whenever he as needed or called upon to help, he was right there. He was involved in their community events – as Rosa put it, ‘He was simply a great friend.’

“Bob development a deep passion for the preservation and celebration of local history. He helped create the Friends of Historic New Utrecht, whose mission was and continues to be to protect and preserve the New Utrecht cemetery, the Liberty Pole, and the historic church behind us. It’s for this reason – his commitment to the history of this neighborhood and this street as his commitment’s focal point – that 83rd Street and 18th Avenue is being name ‘Robert M. Buonvino Place’ in his honor. Although this block already carries some honorary names of people who meant a lot to our community, Bob’s sign, naming this block ‘Robert M. Buonvino Place’ in his honor, will have a special and meaningful spot to watch over the church, flagpole and cemetery that he loves so much.

“I could describe the significant role Bob played in so many community-centered groups and organizations for another couple hours, and others are going to speak about his active involvement in many local groups. But we all know that it’s not necessarily what you do as it is how you do it – and Bob’s spirit was remarkable. You should all have a ceremony program with you – look at the photo of Bob. Look at his smile, at the light in his eyes. This was a man who influenced each of with his enthusiasm and interest in adding to the lives of his neighbors. He invested in the future of local children and in the future of Brooklyn, helped to protect historic New Utrecht and bring it alive to today’s residents and promoted the good causes of veterans and union workers.

“Although he had not been well for a while, when Bob died many of us felt the loss immediately, like a sudden and painful and unexpected blow. He was such an active part of our community – so intent on leaving things better than how he found them – and I know that I, for one, had come to count on him as a friend and as someone who valued the streets and people and resources and groups of this community as much as I do.

“Today, let’s remember the immense good Bob put into our neighborhood. Let’s remember his smile, his energy, and the dozens of ways he left his mark on our lives. That sign up there is one way to remember what he did and what he loved – his love for New Utrecht Reformed Church and historic New Utrecht was a defining part of his life. It’s only right that his name is across from the church forever, watching it and us – and celebrating our successes with us – for years to come.

“When I saw Bob for the last time before he died this past March, the one thing that struck me most was that, even in his painful and deteriorated state, he wanted to know how I was doing and if I was all right with everyone in our community. And when I assured him that I was, he called me closer and kissed my hand. That was a very emotional moment for me because it told me so

much about the man and the character of the man we all knew we were about to lose...At that moment, he was more concerned about me, my future and well-being than he was about what lay ahead for him. I miss Bob – we all miss Bob. And we will miss him deeply for a long time to come. But we know his spirit is still alive and that all he was and all he meant to us will be cherished and live on in our hearts. And when the going gets tough, or you feel as if you've lost your way and could use a friend as caring and selfless as Bob was, you can always look up at this sign and be inspired and strengthened by his memory. That can keep us going on the path that would make Bob proud.

“Thank you, Bob, for the life you shared with us and the lessons you taught the young and not-so-young alike among us: lessons about life, commitment, dedication, and priorities. Those are lessons we will live out in your honor. Thank you for coming everyone, and God Bless Bob Buonvino.”