



A Resolution

adopted by *The City Council*
of the *City of Chicago, Illinois*

TRIBUTE TO JOHNNY LIRA, CHARACTER EXTRAORDINAIRE

WHEREAS, Shakespeare wrote “ the good is oft interred with their bones”. So let it be with Johnny Lira, a former lightweight boxing champion, sometimes controversial but always colorful, who passed away on December 8, 2012; and

WHEREAS, Prior to coming before the Honorable Marvin Aspen at the age of 19 after a botched job of breaking and entering a jewelry store where he fell from the skylight, shattering his leg after the rope broke on which he was lowering himself, Johnny Lira was committing burglaries and getting into street fights. Aspen, now a federal judge, recalls asking him, “What good are you in life? What do you have that’s worthwhile?” Johnny held up his hands like a prizefighter; and

WHEREAS, Judge Aspen took a chance and released Johnny Lira to continue his pugilistic ambitions on the condition that he stay out of trouble and pass on his training in the “sweet science” of boxing to those who where incarcerated. Johnny did not disappoint; and

WHEREAS, Johnny Lira trained at the Catholic Youth Organization’s iconic gym on West Jackson under the tutelage of such greats as Chuck Bodak, Johnny Tocco, and Tony Zale (who was a two-time world middleweight champion). Johnny became Golden Gloves champion the same year Judge Aspen had released him and won the U.S. Lightweight Championship in 1978. A year later, he fought Ernesto Espana for the World Lightweight Championship, coming within two or three counts of a knockout but lost by a TKO when Espana broke his jaw in the ninth round; and

WHEREAS, Since his days with Golden Gloves and the CYO, Johnny Lira was active in working with young amateur fighters at the Union League Boys Club. In 1979, he took his first team of boxers from the club to fight at the Ohio State Fair. The following year, he brought a Union League boxing team to the Illinois Silver Gloves competition in Springfield, an event for budding boxers 15 years of age and under. Out of his team of ten youngsters, eight of them won the championships in their class; and

WHEREAS, Johnny Lira's post-boxing life has had its ups and downs. He assumed the title of "Street Consultant" and used his "street smarts" to involve himself in political campaigning on ward, county and state levels, doing everything from putting up signs, knocking on doors, and getting petitions signed; and

WHEREAS, Johnny Lira tried his hand as a boxing promoter. He used his tough-guy looks and bent nose for bit roles in movies, also helping to coordinate fight scenes. Lira served as the executive producer for the World Shidokan Championships, a full-contact martial arts tournament seen on pay-per-view as well as ESPN and ESPN2, during its first year on cable. He also produced a show for SportsChannel (now Fox Sports Net) called "The Night of Champions." that ended with Julio Cesar Chavez's first-round KO over Craig Houk at the Rosemont Horizon. It was never aired due to a legal dispute with boxing promoter Don King; and

WHEREAS, For a time, Johnny Lira continued to exploit his talents in the entertainment industry. He was an assistant casting director and consultant for the movies "Code of Silence" starring Chuck Norris and "Gladiators" with Cuba Gooding Jr., making a cameo appearance in the latter film. Lira also appeared on a program about undercover mob figure Donnie Brasco on the History Channel; and

WHEREAS, Johnny Lira always held a strong belief in a union and a pension plan for the professional boxer. He would tell anyone who would listen how baseball players, basketball players, football players, and hockey players all have unions, insurance benefits and pensions. Why not the professional pugilist? He was also a fervent advocate of changing the juvenile criminal sentencing guidelines to give judges more flexibility to do what Judge Aspen did for him; now there

BE IT RESOLVED That we, the Mayor and members of the City of Chicago City Council gathered together this 12th Day of December, 2012 AD, do hereby express our sincere sorrow upon the passing of Johnny Lira, a World Class Pug and one of Chicago's legendary characters and extend our deepest condolences to his daughters Nina, Kimberly and Gina as well as his son LeVerge.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED That suitable copies of this resolution be prepared and presented to the family of Johnny Lira.

ROBERT W. FIORETTI
Alderman – 2nd Ward

WALTER BURNETT, JR.
Alderman – 27th Ward