Sponsors: **Anthony W. Higgs,** *Councilman, 3rd District*
Robert Markovich, *Council at large*
Dan Spitale, *Council at Large*
Janet Venecz, *Council at Large*
Mark Kalwinski, *Councilman, 1st District*
Jack Uylaki, *Councilman 2nd District*
Michael Opinker, *Councilman, 5th District*
Homero Hinojosa, *Councilman, 6th District*

ORDINANCE NO. 9291

An Ordinance Designating the first block of Highland Street as "Honorary John J. Latko Street."

WHEREAS, John J. Latko was born on June 19th, 1919 at 371 Deadore St. in East Chicago Indiana. His parents, Andrew Latko and Rose Chajmik, each immigrated from Czechoslovakia landing at Ellis Island in New York. The both moved to Pennsylvania where they met and soon thereafter were married. Andrew and Rose had three sons: Joey, Andrew and John. Unfortunately Joey died while still a young child.

Around 1917 John's parents moved to the Midwest hoping to make a better life for their family. In Northern Indiana Johns father Andrew was able to find a job in the steel industry. While living in Indiana as previously mentioned, John was born at their new address in East Chicago, Indiana. It was at a time when most homes had running water but no electric or indoor plumbing.

While still a young boy, John's family eventually moved to a newer home at 3934 Alder St. in East Chicago. This new home had all the modern conveniences of electric lights and indoor plumbing.

Since John grew up during The Great Depression he remembered many difficult times. One of those was when his father Andrew Sr. lost his industrial job in the steel mills. The family needed money to survive, so he delivered newspapers, cut grass, shoved snow and did any other jobs he could find to try to help with family income. As a young child John attended Riley Grade School in East Chicago Indiana. One of his proudest accolades was getting the highest math score for his grade on an achievement test in the entire city of East Chicago. After finishing grade school John went to East Chicago Washington School where he enjoyed sports and music and his favorite subject was math. In 1938 John graduated from Washington High School.

The last name of Johns' parents written on his birth certificate was Letko. During a mix-up at John's high school, one of his cousin's names was Latko. When asked if he was related, John said yes. The teacher assumed his last name was Latko with an 'A' not an 'E' so it was put in the records that way and was never corrected.

After graduating high school, John was lucky to be accepted into the three CCC's; The Civilian Conservation Corps. He became a counselor and was sent to work in Central

Indiana at Turkey Run State Park. After completing his time in the Three CCC's John made his way by car in 1939 to the San Francisco Bay area in Northern California. From there he boarded a ship and made his way to Alaska to seek fortune mining for gold, fishing and fur trapping.

When John returned back home to East Chicago, Indiana he began working in the steel industry and met the love of his life, Violet Benny. While John and a friend of his were walking on Euclid Street he saw Violet Benny jumping rope with her three sisters in front of their house. He always remembered that day and spoke of it often during his life.

In 1941, John decided that he would serve his year of required military service in the United States Marine Corps. After going through basic training and boot camp, John was promoted and become gunnery mate aboard the U.S.S. West Virginia stationed in Honolulu, Hawaii.

On December 7th, 1941, at 7:50 A.M., John was on deck aboard the U.S.S. West Virginia when the Japanese started their infamous attack. John was unable to fire his assigned 5" gun at the attacking of the Japanese planes without hitting other American ships. After his ship was struck by five Japanese torpedoes, John was forced to abandon ship. He jumped into the water and climbed an oily rope up to the deck of the U.S.S. Tennessee which was docked next to his ship. After the first wave of planes passed he was ordered back to his ship to help fight fires and rescue the many wounded sailors still aboard the U.S.S. West Virginia. After helping carry wounded sailors through the fire to rescue boats that had pulled alongside his ship, and unable to find anyone else to help, John was forced to jump into the last whaleboat carrying wounded sailors ashore. It was at this point that John saw a few sailors that were forced to jump from their sinking ship into the burning diesel fuel below. He asked the coxswain to stop and he found the strength to throw a line to one of the sailors in the water just before he would have been left to drown. This moment was captured by a famous picture featured in the U.S.S. Arizona Memorial in Hawaii as well as many other books and magazines. Many years later in 2001, at the Memorial Day concert on the grounds of the capital in Washington DC, John was honored for his bravery and heroic actions helping to rescue his wounded shipmates during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941.

John survived the rest of World War II where he fought and was stationed in many different posts, such as New Zealand and other posts throughout the South Pacific. He was honorably discharged in September 1945.

Upon his return from the war, John began working in the steel mills. With the help of his uncle Mike Letko, he became the owner and operator of a small business in Downtown East Chicago at 3711 Deadore Place called Johnny's Tavern. In January of 1948, John married Violet Benny, the girl he had met before going off to serve in the U.S. Marine Corps. during World War II. During their marriage they had two sons, John A. Latko and David W. Latko.

In the early 1950's the Korean War had begun. By this time not only the U.S. but the Soviet Union had developed nuclear weapons. John feared a possible escalation of this limited war and another surprise attack like the one he experienced at Pearl Harbor. His greatest concern was a direct attack using nuclear weapons on the United States heartland, namely in East Chicago Indiana, where so much steel was being produced to support the U.S. military in its manufacturing of tanks and weaponry. So to keep his new family safe as possible, the family, including his in-laws, moved to a small town just outside New Orleans. Ironically named Hammond, Louisiana. He hoped this move would keep his family out of danger.

While there he bought some land with this wife and in-laws and built and managed the Rainbow Court, a small motel on Highway 41, within the city of Hammond, Louisiana. Then in the summer of 1955, feeling it was safe to return to the Calumet region, he moved his family to a home near Harrison Park, in Hammond, Indiana, a place he had always had fond memories of visiting when he was a young man. The home at 15 Warren Street was to be the families first home in Hammond. That's the special city in which he would live for the rest of his life.

In 1956, John began working for the Mercantile National Bank on Calumet Avenue in Hammond, Indiana and he happily worked there for the next thirty years of his life.

In 1963, needing a little more space for his growing family, but not wanting to move far away from Harrison Park, which the family loved, or away from Hammond High school, which his son John Jr would be attending the fall, John moved to a home at 4 Highland Street in Hammond, on the corner of Highland Street and State Line Road.

In this house, which he personally updated and expanded with his own labor adding a large family room, for parties and fun, John lived the rest of his life at this special location. As it turned out, that would be a little over 50 years.

John loved to travel, to see new places and experience new adventure. While his two sons were going to school and living at home, he would take the whole family on annual vacations. The family enjoyed trips in the family car throughout Canada, all the way north to Alaska. Also traveling by car along the west coast of Canada and the United States, all the way down to Mexico. Other trips included the parade of roses in Pasadena California, world's fairs in Montreal Canada to New York City, a visit to the nation's capital in Washington D.C. and south to a sightseeing cruise through the Caribbean Sea. You might say because of John, the family visited 48 out of the 50 United States from far north to far south and from sea to shining sea.

John also was very giving and thoughtful. He was a member of the Hammond Exchange Club for many years. A member of St. Joseph Church in Hammond and a life member of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association. John's first wife Violet died of cancer May 1st, 1978, after thirty years of marriage. In early 1979, John met his second wife

Genevieve Szarkowicz, at a St. Joseph church function. Early the next year in January 1980, they were married in a nice ceremony at St. Joseph church.

John's sons, John and David, with their fathers strong support both finished Indiana University with post graduate degrees. After living and working from coast to coast in their chosen fields, came back to Hammond Indiana, bought homes and have worked in the financial services industry for almost 30 years. John retired from his position as an officer at the Mercantile National Back in early 1986, and with his second wife Genevieve, traveled around the country as well as some parts of Northern Europe. He also make it back to Alaska for the third time in his life and made many trips back to Hawaii for the Pearl Harbor ceremonies on December 7th with his wife and ,when possible, his son John Jr. would join him.

John also loved the time he spent at home in Hammond with his wife and family, his sons John and David and David's wife Janice and their two children Tiffany and David Jr. He also loved the time he spent with his brother Andy and his sister-in-law Margret. He also enjoyed the time he spent with other close family members, his numerous friendships made while working at the bank and his many neighborhood friends and pals.

John also cherished his friendship and companionship with those fellow members of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association. For a number of years he also proudly served as president of District Two of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association which is located in the northwest corner of Indiana. John, along with this second wife, was very involved in church activities. John would often serve as chairman and run the annual Las Vegas Night at the church to help raise funds for the parishes of many different charities. His wife would help out by volunteering at the St. Joseph soup kitchen for the needy.

After more than 25 years of marriage, John's second wife passed away on December 3, 2005. It was a very difficult time but with the help of his eldest son John Jr., who lived nearby in Hammond, a new friend Nancy Sutton and many other friends, John was able to stay in his home at 4 Highland Street, still staying active in family, church and Pearl Harbor activities.

On June 19th, 2009, John turned 90 years old. The next day he was treated with a surprise 90th birthday party with over 75 of his closest friends and family. At the lighting of the candles on the cake, John led his party groups in singing so many of the patriotic songs that he loved to sing that almost all of the candles burned down to the nubs before he was able to blow them out.

After over 58 years of living in Hammond and over 50 years in his home on 4 Highland Street in Hammond, John J. Latko passed away in that home peacefully with his two sons, John Jr. and David holding his hands one last time.

In recognition of his services to his country and to his city, the council finds it appropriate to designate the block on which he lived for over 50 years, an honorary street in his memory.

THEREFORE BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COMMON COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF HAMMOND that the first block of Highland Street is hereby designated "John J. Latko Street." An honorary designation does not change the official name of a street or the addresses of any persons living on the street.

PASSED by the Common Council of the City of Hammond, on the 13th day of April, 2015.

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MICHAEL OPINKER, PRESIDENT /s/

ATTEST:

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ROBERT J. GOLEC, CITY CLERK /s/

PRESENTED BY ME, the undersigned City Clerk of the City of Hammond, to the Mayor of said City for his approval on the 14th day of April, 2015.

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ROBERT J. GOLEC, CITY CLERK /s/

The foregoing Ordinance No. 9291 consisting of 5 pages, including this page approved by the Mayor on the 20th day of April, 2015.

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THOMAS M. McDERMOTT, JR., /s/

MAYOR, City of Hammond, Indiana

PASSED by the Common Council on the 13th day of April, 2015, and approved by the Mayor on the 20th day of April, 2015.

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ROBERT J. GOLEC, CITY CLERK /s/