

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, Sam Sianis, legendary owner of the Billy Goat Tavern, beloved Chicago tavernkeeper, and iconic figure in the City's sports, media, and hospitality communities, passed away on May 15, 2026, at the age of 91; and

WHEREAS, the City of Chicago has been notified of Sam's passing by the Honorable Brendan Reilly, Alderman of the 42nd Ward; and

WHEREAS, Sam was born Sotirios Athanasios Sianis on December 12, 1934, in the village of PalaioPyrgos, Greece, and was raised by his father, Athanasios, and a large extended family after the death of his mother, Theofana, shortly after his birth; and

WHEREAS, after leaving formal schooling following one year of high school, Sam worked on his family farm, plowing, cutting wheat, and learning the value of hard work, responsibility, and perseverance; and

WHEREAS, at the age of 19, Sam came to the United States, landing in New York on May 15, 1955, before making his way to San Francisco, where he worked in a family coffee shop and later as an apprentice mechanic for the Southern Pacific Railroad; and

WHEREAS, in 1960, Sam moved to Chicago to work for his uncle, William "Billy Goat" Sianis, at the Billy Goat Inn on Madison Street across from the former Chicago Stadium; and

WHEREAS, at the Billy Goat Inn, Sam mopped floors, filled coolers, tended bar, fed the goats kept behind the building, and learned the business from the ground up, developing a work ethic that would define the rest of his life; and

WHEREAS, the Billy Goat name was already part of Chicago legend by the time Sam arrived, thanks to his uncle William's famous goat, Murphy, and the "Curse of the Billy Goat" born after William and Murphy were refused entrance to Wrigley Field during the 1945 World Series; and

WHEREAS, in 1964, the Billy Goat Tavern moved to its subterranean location on Hubbard Street beneath Michigan Avenue, near the Chicago River and within steps of the City's daily newspapers, giving the tavern a steady stream of reporters, printers, boat captains, public officials, workers, visitors, and loyal regulars; and

WHEREAS, after William Sianis' death in 1970, Sam carried the tavern forward with tireless dedication, preserving its character while helping build the Billy Goat Tavern into one of the best-known taverns in the country; and

WHEREAS, in 1974, while visiting Greece, Sam met Irene Dariotis, whom he married that November, and together they made their home in Park Ridge, raised six children, and kept family at the center of the Billy Goat Tavern's life and legacy; and

WHEREAS, Sam became known far beyond Chicago after the Billy Goat inspired the "Olympia Restaurant" sketch on Saturday Night Live in 1978, immortalizing the familiar refrain, "Cheezborger, cheezborger, cheezborger," and the tavern's famous rule of "no fries, chips; no Coke, Pepsi"; and

WHEREAS, Sam took the tavern's fame in stride, welcoming famous visitors and everyday customers alike, and the Billy Goat continued to attract public figures, athletes, chefs, journalists, tourists, and Chicagoans who were drawn to its character and its owner; and

WHEREAS, columnist Mike Royko, a regular at the Billy Goat Tavern and a close friend of Sam, helped make the tavern a home away from home for Chicago journalism and recognized in Sam a man of hard work, good humor, fairness, and honor; and

WHEREAS, throughout the decades, Sam remained closely tied to the Cubs and the "Curse of the Billy Goat," sometimes appearing at Wrigley Field with goats and continuing the family legend until the Cubs' historic 2016 World Series championship; and

WHEREAS, the walls of the Billy Goat Tavern became a living record of Chicago life, covered with photographs of family members, employees, writers, athletes, public officials, and regular customers whose stories helped shape the tavern's place in the City's history; and

WHEREAS, even as the Billy Goat name expanded to multiple locations, Sam kept the business rooted in family, loyalty, hard work, and the unmistakable spirit of the original tavern; and

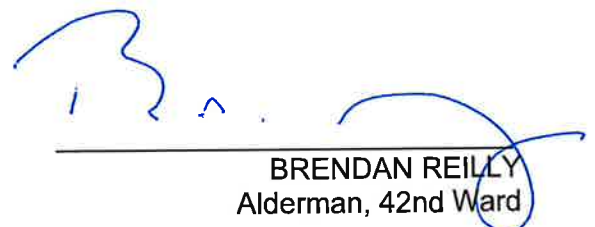
WHEREAS, Sam's family and friends will remember him as a man who loved Greece, loved Chicago, treated employees and customers fairly, helped others who came to this country, and brought warmth, humor, and dignity to every day of his work; and

WHEREAS, Sam is survived by his beloved wife, Irene; his sons, Bill, Tom, Paul, and Ted; his daughters, Patty Sianis and Jenny Constantinou; his 12 grandchildren; and many other family members, friends, employees, and loyal patrons; and

WHEREAS, Sam Sianis lived a life that reflected the immigrant spirit, entrepreneurial energy, and neighborhood character that have long defined the City; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that we, the Mayor and members of the City Council of the City of Chicago, do hereby mourn the passing of Sam Sianis and celebrate his extraordinary life, his enduring contributions to Chicago, and his role in making the Billy Goat Tavern a treasured institution of this great City; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a suitable copy of this resolution be presented to the family of Sam Sianis as a sign of our deepest sympathy and our lasting gratitude for his life and legacy.


BRENDAN REILLY
Alderman, 42nd Ward