

## **Lincoln Alexander Funeral To See Former Ontario Lieutenant-Governor Laid To Rest**

**By Linda Nguyen**

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HAMILTON - Former Ontario lieutenant-governor Lincoln Alexander was honoured Friday in a rare provincial state funeral as a trailblazer who has left a lasting legacy on Canadian politics.

The two-hour service, attended by thousands in his hometown of Hamilton, was a celebration of Alexander's life and many accomplishments as the country's first black Member of Parliament.

Described as a man of towering height and a loud, booming voice, his close friends and family remembered him as someone who had boundless energy and charmed everyone he met, whether they were the Queen of England or a cashier at Tim Hortons.

"He was unstoppable, undeniable," his granddaughter Erika Alexander told those attending the service at Hamilton Place.

Known to his friends as "Linc," she called him "Bubba" and credited him with teaching her to love herself, her family and her heritage.

The only family member who spoke, Erika Alexander said she recognized the struggles her grandfather faced growing up in a society where he was the only black face around, making the barriers he broke down in education, politics and law that much more significant.

He never let "doubts of society" make him doubt his own strengths and self-worth, she said in the tearful eulogy.

Friday's service, the second provincial state funeral ever held in Ontario, was attended by many dignitaries including Gov. Gen. David Johnston, former governor general Michaëlle Jean, MP Julian Fantino, and Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty.

His wife, Marni Alexander, son Keith Alexander and grandchildren, Erika and Marissa, watched the service for Alexander, who died Oct. 19 at the age of 90, from the front row of the packed hall.

The ceremony included performances of Alexander's favourite hymns and a video tribute in which he described his childhood and experiences, eliciting laughter and tears from those attending.

Standing next to Alexander's casket, which was draped with a Canadian flag on centre stage, former Ontario Premier David Peterson said the two became close in the hallways of the Ontario legislature.

He reminisced of times he would walk down to Alexander's office at Queen's Park looking for his advice.

The two would sit, have a smoke and discuss state affairs, said Peterson.

In later years, the two would often have each other over for dinner and go to the theatre together. Peterson said his dear friend was someone who was a snappy dresser and knew how to charm his way with the ladies, but most importantly, he was a man of the people fitting of his nickname.

"(Linc) linked people to people, community to community," said Peterson.

Former Toronto Argonauts football player Michael (Pinball) Clemons called Alexander his hero, someone who swam against the current and made it.

"He didn't just look the part. He was a leader personified. He was a leader of leaders," said a tearful Clemons. "A trailblazer of the highest order."

Clemons said although Alexander was a black man who achieved the highest success, what was most important to him above all else was that he was a Canadian.

Alexander's strength was that he came from humble beginnings, Clemons said. His father was a railway porter, and his mother was a maid who taught him that education was the key to success.

Clemons said it was Alexander's experience as a pilot in the Royal Canadian Air Force, and then as a graduate of Hamilton's McMaster University and eventually law school that led him to treat everyone the same, regardless of their background or stature in life. When Alexander graduated with a law degree, he became one of five black lawyers in the province.

"(He faced) an ocean of hatred, a sea of uncertainty, a river of disadvantage," Clemons said. "He loved everyone just the way they were."

Earlier in the day, thousands of people lined the streets of Hamilton to say goodbye to Alexander — a man who had dined with royalty, but was a familiar face at the local diner.

Alexander was known to cruise around town on his red scooter, waving at passersby with a silly grin on his face, and always with a moment to spare to chat.

Many wiped away tears and waved as they watched his hearse make its way from city hall to the arena for the service.

Alexander's casket lay in state at the legislature last weekend before it was moved to Hamilton, where he lay in repose until Friday's ceremony.

Thirty-eight-year-old Lyla Miklos said she came to pay her respects to a Hamiltonian who paved the way for the disenfranchised.

"I think Linc deserved every moment of this," she said.

Born in Toronto in 1922 to West Indian immigrants, Alexander was first elected as a Conservative MP to Parliament in 1968, and was re-elected in 1972, 1979 and 1980.

He was one of the people former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau mouthed expletives at in the House of Commons in 1971, but never revealed what he had said to Trudeau to elicit that reaction.

Alexander was also Canada's first black cabinet minister — holding the labour portfolio from 1979 to 1980 in the Joe Clark government and served as lieutenant governor from 1985 to 1991 — Ontario's first black vice-regal.