

ALEX RIVERA



DURHAM - Alexander McAllister 'Alex' Rivera of Durham, North Carolina, 95, died Thursday evening, October 23, 2008, after months of declining health. He was the son of Daisy Irene Dillard Rivera and Dr. Alexander M. Rivera, Sr., a general dentist.

Alex grew up in Greensboro, N.C. He moved to Washington, DC to attend college at Howard University, but in 1939, his father's friend, Dr. James E. Shepard, of Durham, sent for him. He was offered the opportunity to study at North Carolina College for Negroes (now NCCU) while working as the school's first paid publicity agent. He later graduated in 1941.

During his adult life, Alex became a nationally acclaimed photojournalist. He held jobs with several newspapers including The Pittsburgh Courier, The Washington Tribune and The Norfolk Journal and Guide. Many times he risked his life to report on lynchings and the trials that resulted from these investigations.

In 1955, he received the Global News Syndicate Journalism Achievement Award for his coverage following the Brown vs. the Board of Education decision. Alex was one of the first African American reporters to regularly participate in North Carolina gubernatorial press conferences. In 1957, he was invited by then Vice-President Richard M. Nixon to join his press team for a historic trip to cover the Independent Celebration of Ghana, West Africa. It was the good public relations work of Rivera that was instrumental in bringing President Gerald R. Ford to the NCCU campus in 1975. In 1999, he was inducted into the National Association of Black Journalists Hall of Fame as a photojournalist. In 1993, Governor James B. Hunt, Jr. recognized Alex's contributions by awarding him the Order of the Longleaf Pine.

For years, Alex operated his own photography studio in downtown Durham and worked with Jostens, Inc. In the mid 1970's, he returned to NCCU where he worked as head of the school's public relations office. He retired from that position in 1993. An avid golfer, he helped integrate local area golf courses.

Rivera was also involved with the John Avery Boys and Girls Club, the Salvation Army Boys and Girls Club, the Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People, and was a charter member and founder of the North Carolina Chapter of the Guardsmen. The Rotary Foundation of Rotary International rewarded him as a Paul Harris Fellow in 1996. He was bestowed as an Honorary Tar Heel in 2000 and was "Tar Heel of the Week" in February 2005. He received the NCCU "Truth and Service" Award and the St. Joseph's Historic Foundation, Inc. Historic Preservation Award at the Spirit of Hayti Awards Ceremony and Gala in 2003.

Rivera organized the first annual "Gathering of the Eagles" at NCCU in 1980. He was inducted into the NCCU Athletic Hall of Fame in 1984, into the CIAA Hall of Fame in 1988, and into the National Football Foundation and College Hall of Fame in 1996. The NCCU Athletic Hall of Fame was renamed the Alex M. Rivera Athletic Hall of Fame in 2005. Rivera received the first ever Lifetime Achievement Award given by NCCU in 2005 at the Legacy Gala.

Alex's lifelong work as a "Pioneer Photojournalist for Black America" has been on display at different venues, and some of his work is currently on display at the North Carolina Museum of History, in downtown Raleigh, through March 1, 2009.

On Nov. 17, 2008, North Carolina Governor Michael Easley honors Alex and 7 others with the North Carolina Awards. The medal, given annually since 1964, is the highest honor the State of North Carolina can bestow.

Alex was united in marriage to Faye Faucette Rivera. She, along with one sibling, Mrs. Doris Burgess, preceded him in death. Survivors include a son and daughter-in-law, Dr. Eric M. and Mrs. Robin Rivera of Durham, a sister, Mrs. Raven Elliott, formerly of Detroit, Mich., an adopted son and daughter, Mr. Robert and Mrs. Clara Lawson of Durham, and extended family.

A memorial service will be held at 3 p.m., on Friday, October 31, 2008, at St. Joseph's AME Church, 2521 Fayetteville Street, Durham. In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to the "Alex. M. and Faye F. Rivera Scholarship Fund", through the Foundation Office at North Carolina Central University, 1801 Fayetteville Street, Durham, N.C. 27707.

Services entrusted to Scarborough & Hargett Funeral Home, Inc. Durham, N.C.

<http://www.heraldsun.com/obituaries/obit10262008.cfml#60515>