



Mr. Johnnie Lee Caldwell

September 16, 1927 - July 19, 2022

ALLEN CHAPEL A.M.E. CHURCH IS HOSTING A SERVICE IN LOVING MEMORY FOR THE FAMILY OF MR. JOHNNIE LEE CALDWELL ON FRIDAY, JULY 29, 2022. PLEASE SEE VISITATIONS, SERVICE TIMES & LOCATION BELOW**

*****PLEASE NOTE: WHEN ENTERING THE CHURCH: MASKS AND SOCIAL DISTANCING ARE STILL REQUIRED. THE CHURCH WILL PROVIDE HAND SANITIZER WHEN ENTERING THE BUILDING.

*****IN LIEU OF FLOWERS: THE FAMILY REQUESTS SENDING CONTRIBUTIONS TO EITHER:
KAIROS DWELLING, 2945 Gull Road, Kalamazoo, Michigan 49048
-OR-
THE KALAMAZOO GOSPEL MISSION, 448 N. Burdick Street, Kalamazoo, Michigan 49007

****ATTENTION TO THOSE WHO WOULD LIKE TO VIEW SERVICES ONLINE FROM HOME, ZOOM INFORMATION IS AS FOLLOWS:

Rev. Millard F. Southern, III is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: Allen Chapel AMEC-Funeral Service for Johnnie "John" Caldwell

Time: July 29, 2022, 11:30 AM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84375636907?pwd=QXNtYy91Z3VSdnBDUGdMMWIJMy9rdz09>

Meeting ID: 843 7563 6907

Passcode: 811448

One tap mobile

+16465588656,,84375636907#,,,,*811448# US (New York)

+13017158592,,84375636907#,,,,*811448# US (Washington DC)

Dial by your location

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Meeting ID: 843 7563 6907

Passcode: 811448

Find your local number: Video Conferencing, Web Conferencing, Webinars, Screen Sharing

THE OBITUARY

Johnnie Lee Caldwell is being celebrated as a beloved father, grandfather, great grandfather, educator and mentor.

The longtime Kalamazoo resident and past director of the Douglass Community Association, died Tuesday, July 19, 2022 after a long bout with cancer. Family members were at his side. He was 94.

To the community he may be remembered as the stern but caring man who directed hundreds of area young people at four Kalamazoo area schools,

ultimately as principal of Kalamazoo Central High School. To his family and friends, he was known as a dependable, resourceful and determined soul who was always available to help and provide great advice.

The eldest of nine children, Caldwell was born on Sept. 16, 1927 in Kansas City, Kan., the son of A.D. Caldwell Sr., a steelworker, and Pearline (McGhee) Caldwell, who worked as a domestic. The family lived in a small but well-maintained house where roll-away beds were needed in the front room to accommodate siblings and members of the extended family.

Caldwell learned to be responsible for his younger siblings, watching them from an early age while his parents were at work. Nonetheless he did well in school and excelled in sports, table tennis and at almost any game he tried.

He played basketball and ran track at Sumner High School in Kansas City before graduating and joining the U.S. Army. After a two-year enlistment, he used the G.I. Bill to attend Kansas State University and parlayed his athletic skills there as a quarter-mile runner on its track team and as a shooting guard on its basketball team. He was coached there for a while by Naismith Memorial Hall of Fame basketball coach Tex Winter.

With a desire to become a teacher, he earned a bachelor's degree in education and recreation, and a master's degree in physical education. But he found little opportunity to work as an educator in Kansas at a time when many school districts would not hire an African-American to teach.

He used his knowledge and skills to become associate director of the Douglass Community Association in Manhattan, Kan. He was an all-around leader for that social service and recreational agency, doubling as a lifeguard, swimming instructor, playground supervisor, and coach for its baseball,

softball and basketball clinics.

In order to try to expand his horizons, he wrote letters to more than four dozen similar organizations around the country. That resulted in an opportunity for him to relocate in 1956 to work as associate director of the Douglass Community Association in Kalamazoo. After a mix-up in the time for his job interview, he missed that appointment but a member of the association board stated that he was hired based on the strength of the letter he wrote asking for the job.

Earlier that same year he had married his wife Irma. In Kalamazoo, she worked as a nurse and John earned a master's degree in counseling from Western Michigan University. In 1958, the two became parents. Their son, Christopher Caldwell, matured to follow in his father's footsteps, becoming a teacher and athletic coach in the Kalamazoo Public Schools.

John Caldwell, who operated a pest control business (Asa Pest Control) while leading the Douglas Community Association, rose to become executive director of that organization. But he left the position in 1963 when he was able to become an educator in 1963 at Milwood Junior High School.

He started there as a boys' guidance teacher and counselor, working with youngsters who had serious behavior and academic problems. From there, he was promoted to assistant principal at Kalamazoo Central High School at its original location on South Westnedge Avenue. That was in 1968, four days after the assassination of civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. During that time, Caldwell helped guide its students through several years of racial unrest, and he was among local Black leaders recognized for doing so.

He became principal at Oakwood Junior High School (which is now Woods Lake Elementary) in 1973 as school desegregation caused unrest in the

Kalamazoo community. He described conditions as “riotous” that year but he spent the summer visiting the homes of hostile parents to help effect change.

Caldwell was known to be a rules-governed man who insisted that students also follow rules. But he was a caring man who was also known to ride school buses to check for problems and visit students’ homes when their behavior or work began to falter. “Firm but fair” was among his sayings as he watched young men and women grow to respect the structure he provided and graduate into better lives.

In 1980, he was named principal of Hillside Junior High School and quickly made needed but not always welcomed changes for its staff. His methods as a fair-but-firm leader were successful however and in 1985 he was named principal of Kalamazoo Central High School, which had relocated to North Drake Road on Kalamazoo’s West Side.

“From now on, I’m in it 24 hours a day,” he told members of the Kalamazoo Board of Education as he was unanimously appointed to lead the high school. According to a report in the Kalamazoo Gazette, he was known to tell students they ought to be in awe of their teachers “because they can help you make something of your life.” Speaking of what is necessary for a competent teacher to succeed, he also once said, “A good teacher could teach well with just students standing over there in that corner with a blackboard. Everything else is just trappings.”

Caldwell was a life-long learner and an advocate for civil rights. He pushed to see more women hired as coaches of girls sports teams. In 1965 he helped establish a fund to promote justice for Blacks in Selma, Ala. And he was actively involved for years with the Metropolitan Kalamazoo Branch of the NAACP.

John enjoyed spending time with family and enjoyed a friendship with Curtis Isaac, who was a fifth grade student when they met, but has been coach of the Kalamazoo Eastside Boxing Academy for more than 30 years.

Caldwell also loved to play golf and was the winner of more than one teachers' league tournament while working for the Kalamazoo Public Schools. During the summer of 1985, he was golf instructor for adults at Grand Prairie Golf Course. He was also a valued member of the Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity and was a Freemason and proud member and past master of its Central Lodge No. 10 in Kalamazoo and the Michigan Council of deliberation, PHA. For his exemplary service, Scottish Rite Freemasons, he received the 33rd and last degree, and distinction of sovereign grand inspector general of the United Supreme Council.

He is survived by his wife of more than 66 years, Irma, and his son Christopher (Betty) Caldwell, both of Kalamazoo; grandsons Paeton R. Caldwell and Nathan S. Caldwell, both of Kalamazoo; great-grandchildren Kinleigh Jackson, Zeegwun Caldwell, Nathan S. Caldwell Jr., and Kai Caldwell; and a host of nieces and nephews. Also surviving are his brothers Larry Caldwell of Kansas City, Howard Pannell of Houston, Texas, and Ralph Pannell of Phoenix, Ariz.; his sisters Jackie Cary of Houston, Pauline Nelson of Houston, Judy Northern of Kansas City, Linda Weaver of Kansas City, and Beverly Kelsey, also of Kansas City.

He was preceded in death by his parents A.D. Caldwell Sr. and Pearline (McGhee) Caldwell, as well as his step-mother Lois (Washington) Caldwell. Also preceding him in death were: his sister Christine Henderson of Kansas City; his brothers Barry Williams of Kansas City, Monte Washington of Kansas City, Ronnie Washington of Kansas City, A.D. "Adam" Caldwell Jr. of Kansas City, and Charles Pannell of Chicago; and his grandson Joe L. Jackson of

Kalamazoo.

The family would like give a special thanks to Carmina Jones of Knapps Flowers for the beautiful flower arrangements.

Cemetery Details

Mt. Ever-Rest Cemetery (North)

1717 Drake Road
Kalamazoo, MI

Previous Events

Visitation

JUL 28. 4:30 PM - 6:30 PM (ET)

Allen Chapel A.M.E. Church
804 W. North Street
Kalamazoo, MI

Fraternal Ceremony-Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. and Masonic Ceremony

JUL 28. 6:30 PM - 7:45 PM (ET)

Allen Chapel A.M.E. Church
804 W. North Street
Kalamazoo, MI

Visitation

JUL 29. 11:00 AM - 11:30 AM (ET)

Allen Chapel A.M.E. Church
804 W. North Street
Kalamazoo, MI

A Service in Loving Memory

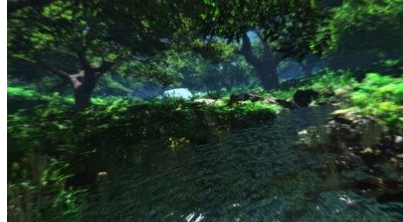
JUL **29**. 11:30 AM (ET)

Allen Chapel A.M.E. Church
804 W. North Street
Kalamazoo, MI

Tribute Wall



“ Harper Funeral Home created a Tribute Video in memory of Mr. Johnnie Lee Caldwell



Harper Funeral Home - July 26, 2022 at 11:07 PM

FL

John and I came through a tumultuous era that needed the strong and firm leadership of a John Caldwell! His guidance enabled many to reach a lifestyle they never thought possible. He was a friend, fellow educator, community leader who impacted many lives. May many follow in his footsteps!!!

My wife and I send our love to Irma and the family and for all the contributions, sacrifices you made over the years.

Pray the comfort and consoling of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ be upon you always.

Fletcher and Jean Lewis....Arlington, Texas

Fletcher Lewis - August 01, 2022 at 02:30 PM



*Kimberly Kirk-Smith....Tampa, FL
Shirley Haymer....North Hills, CA*

Kimberly Kirk - August 03, 2022 at 05:48 PM



“ Mr. Johnnie Lee Caldwell

October 23, 2023 at 06:06 AM



“ *Mr. Johnnie Lee Caldwell*

October 06, 2023 at 10:42 AM



“ *John Caldwell was a great teacher who inspired so many of us who spent time in the summers and after school at the old Douglass Community Center on Ransom Street in Kalamazoo. My biggest takeaway from Mr. Caldwell was his sincere passion to help others succeed.*

My deepest sympathies go out to the Caldwell family. May God give you the peace that you seek.

Michael McKinley Arlington, Virginia

Michael McKinley - August 07, 2022 at 10:52 AM



“ *Mr. Caldwell was a joy to talk to; as he and my father were good friends from Sumner and Kansas State. They would periodically call one another and talk for a good amount of time; as my father lived between Wisconsin and his last years Texas. I personally took over calling once my father died. The Hoyt Givens family extends our sincere condolences to the Caldwell family. We know God will continue to light the way for your family! Blessings - Joyt Givens Gray*



Joyt Gray - August 03, 2022 at 08:26 AM



“ *Tanya Williams lit a candle in memory of Mr. Johnnie Lee Caldwell*



Tanya Williams - July 30, 2022 at 03:04 PM

DR

“ *David Rivette lit a candle in memory of Mr. Johnnie Lee Caldwell*



David Rivette - July 28, 2022 at 10:14 PM

JC

“ *Jermaine Clark lit a candle in memory of Mr. Johnnie Lee Caldwell*



Jermaine Clark - July 28, 2022 at 12:03 AM

PF

“ *Patterson Family lit a candle in memory of Mr. Johnnie Lee Caldwell*



Patterson Family - July 27, 2022 at 10:15 PM

CS

“ Family, my deepest condolences go out to you. Everyone is in our thoughts and prayers, Love Debbie & Johnetta Stevenson.

Constance S - July 27, 2022 at 07:34 PM

HS

“ Hilda Snell sent a virtual gift in memory of Mr. Johnnie Lee Caldwell



Hilda Snell - July 27, 2022 at 06:28 PM

HS

“ Hilda Snell lit a candle in memory of Mr. Johnnie Lee Caldwell



Hilda Snell - July 27, 2022 at 06:28 PM

JV

“ Janie Varnesdeel lit a candle in memory of Mr. Johnnie Lee Caldwell



Janie Varnesdeel - July 26, 2022 at 10:52 AM

PG

“ *Pauline (Mills) Gardner lit a candle in memory of Mr. Johnnie Lee Caldwell*



Pauline (Mills) Gardner - July 26, 2022 at 08:36 AM

TP

“ *Mr. Caldwell you will be miss*

Toney Patterson



Toney Patterson - July 25, 2022 at 04:24 PM

AB

“ *Angela Brown lit a candle in memory of Mr. Johnnie Lee Caldwell*



Angela Brown - July 25, 2022 at 01:29 PM

JG

“ *Condolences to the Caldwell family.*



JoAnne & Renaford Owens Jr-Atlanta GA - July 25, 2022 at 01:10 PM

SB

“ John was a real leader with the local and state organization of retired school personnel. He served as President of KARSP and MARSP.

He always had a place at the head table at our monthly luncheons for the local chapter.

In John's later years, he would call me on a regular basis with updates on his wife and would ask how I was doing. He was a very selfless man and did not like any focus on himself. He told me many times that his wife sacrificed many years while he served the community and it was time for him to take care of her. What a wonderful role model!!

Sandy Beiter

sandy beiter - July 25, 2022 at 08:30 AM

JS

“ My prayers for your loss. Mr. Caldwell was my principal in high school at KC and I always had great interactions with him. He was a great leader and cared immensely about student academic outcomes.

James Snider - July 25, 2022 at 07:50 AM

JR

“ This very kind soul of a man was my principal at Kalamazoo Central from 1985-1989 and I have to say I admired him as I do now so sorry for your loss.

james roe - July 24, 2022 at 09:30 PM

TW

“ My condolences to the family of Mr. Caldwell. My mother, Mary Ward, was a secretary to Mr. Caldwell for many years at Central High School. He was a man of integrity and principles that she held in the highest esteem. Just as he always wanted the best for his students, he also wanted the best for my mother and he treated her well. She always spoke so highly of him.

Tom Ward - July 24, 2022 at 02:53 PM

J.

“ I grew up near where Mr. Caldwell lived on the Northside of Kalamazoo. I remember him umpiring many fast pitch softball games at the Versluis Dickinson park complex. Players always respected him. Some of those games became pretty contentious, but he was always firm and fair. Good memories for sure.

J. DeVries

J.DeVries - July 24, 2022 at 01:06 PM

BM

“ My condolences goes out to Chris and family, as a boy who lived up the street from the Caldwell's, my nephew Tony and I was always welcome to their home and invited to eat supper with them, introduced me to bowling, Thanks Mr. John Caldwell.



Bernard Martin - July 24, 2022 at 10:34 AM

DA

“ Thank you Mr. Caldwell for being amazing. Thank you for being my friend during my daughter's years at Kalamazoo Central. You and I worked hard together to make Kalamazoo Centrals sports program better. Your words of wisdom "this is your school! Do what you need to do" Thank you! Love, Debi

Debi Atkins-Steward - July 24, 2022 at 09:24 AM

GL

“ my husband Gordon and I met Irma and John years ago playing tennis at West Hills and thought they were a wonderful couple. Our best to Irma and family Gloria Lentz

gloria lentz - July 23, 2022 at 06:59 PM

DK

“ Diane Kelley lit a candle in memory of Mr. Johnnie Lee Caldwell



Diane Kelley - July 23, 2022 at 04:16 PM

JH

“ Jerry Harris lit a candle in memory of Mr. Johnnie Lee Caldwell



Jerry Harris - July 23, 2022 at 02:00 PM

HB

“ *My condolences to the family of Mr. Caldwell. It was years, years ago meeting Mr. Caldwell at the Douglass Community Center on Ransom Street. He was a kind man.*



Helen (Mills) Brooks - July 23, 2022 at 11:44 AM

EB

My condolences goes out to the family of Mr. Caldwell I could never pay him for how much positive influence he had on my life RIP love you sir

Elder Sherwood Bradford - July 24, 2022 at 12:15 AM

CE

“ *Our condolences for your loss. Mr. Johnnie Lee Caldwell was a great leader and principal! We will always remember his words of wisdom and how to help so many students to be successful in our community!!*



Charmane Echols - July 23, 2022 at 11:21 AM

BB

Mr Caldwell was a great leader, will be missed by all Rest now. 🙏🙏

Betty Blanks - July 23, 2022 at 05:52 PM

RP

We met in August, 1951 when he was a student at Kansas State and I a draftee at Fort Riley. When I came here in 1968, he was the first to greet me. He and I were members of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity as well as Prince Hall Masons. I cherish his memory.

Romeo Phillips - July 24, 2022 at 04:15 PM

SV

As a graduate of Kalamazoo Central and as a sales clerk at Libin's, I got to know Mr. Caldwell as a good leader and a good man. May he rest in peace.

Scott VanderNoot - July 27, 2022 at 04:45 PM