



Ray Alexander, 81, recently retired from a career that began as a janitor while still in high school and eventually included successful forays as an

orchardist, fruit broker and truck broker. He still helps out when they need him at the Kader Co., a Union Gap truck-brokerage firm.

MAY 27, 2001

# Leaving His Mark

BY ED STOVER  
YAKIMA HERALD-REPUBLIC

The door of the tidy West Valley home opens, and there stands Ray Alexander, a diminutive great-grandfather with a neat, pencil mustache.

"Hi, c'mon in," says the affable, soft-spoken man who, at 81, is retiring from a working life that began in poverty in the depths of the Great Depression.

He appears small in comparison to the towering reputation he's won after a 66-year working life that embraces several careers — he was a tool grinder for years, then an orchardist, then an orchard labor contractor, then a fruit broker and truck broker. He had his own businesses, and he worked for others.

At each turn, he carved out respect: Hard worker, bosses and coworkers say — tenacious — easy to work with — a workhorse — persistent — really fair ... very sharp ... a role model — very, VERY persistent ... totally enthusiastic ... optimistic ... extremely reliable ...

Ray took his first job at 15, sweeping floors at Bell-Wyman Motors, the Dodge/Plymouth dealership at the cor-

*Ray Alexander has spent a lifetime working in many different jobs, but no matter where he goes, his coworkers describe him the same way*

## LOCAL HISTORY

ner of South First and Chestnut avenues. He was trying to help his widowed mother support the family. Finally, in his senior year, he dropped out of Yakima High School to work full time.

"There were nine of us kids," recalls Ray, the seventh of Clarence and Mabel Alexander's children. "My dad died when I was 5, and I just hated to see her (Mom) working all the time. So I quit school to get a job, and that hurt her more than anything else." During this time, he and his late wife, Margie, raised four boys and two girls. At the core of it all was hard work and the drive to succeed. The testimonials on Ray's behalf are enthusiastic and unanimous.

"He was a workhorse," says Bud Owens, owner of Leonardo Truck Line in Selah. "When I first met him (in the

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"50s), I had a service station and he sold me a cigarette machine. Then he got into selling apples for making apple juice and I had a diesel truck and started hauling for him ...

"He was very, very persistent. He wanted things done the right way and he was always in a hurry. I think that's why he was so successful."

A black man who came of age at a time when black men were expected to be menial laborers, Ray wasn't content with janitorial work. From Bell-Wyman, he went to Cheshire Motors, then, in 1936, to Lindeman Power & Equipment, which was located where Noel Canning, 1011 S. Third St., is today.

"The white guys all wanted to move up and be machinists, and they thought I'd be happy to stay as head janitor. But there was an opening in

the tool (storage) crib and I applied and got it. That was one thing about the Lindemans, they'd let you try anything."

The Lindemans — four brothers who pioneered and produced farm equipment, including what eventually became the John Deere Orchard Crawler tractor — were also well-positioned to produce war materials during World War II.

"We made good money," says Ray, who received yet another promotion — to tool grinder. "We got a contract with the Navy to produce submarine parts. At the height of the war, we employed 500 men and ran three shifts."

The Lindemans eventually sold out to John Deere and, in about 1953, Ray was given a choice — move to a new plant site in Iowa or stay in Yakima and start fresh.

"I've worked with Ray for probably 14 or 15 years," says Fred Boudreau, a produce and transportation broker with the Leticiano Produce Co. in Boston who often did business with Ray over the phone. "He's the kind of guy who keeps coming back for more. We've all had our

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