

Local Muslims honor Muhammad Ali

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He was easily one of the highest-profile Muslims in the sports world, and Friday, the Islamic Association of the Finger Lakes held a memorial service to honor boxing legend Muhammad Ali.

Ali died June 3 at the age of 74. He was born Cassius Clay Jr. in 1942 in Louisville, Kentucky, converted to Islam in 1960, and in 1964 changed his name to reflect his new faith. Ali suffered from Parkinson's disease in his later years.

On the same day as Ali's funeral in Louisville, the Islamic Association held a service at its Big Flats headquarters to celebrate Ali's contributions to sports, humanity and the Islamic faith.

"He showed the world what real courage looks like. By his example, Muhammad Ali taught us how to speak out, how to float like a butterfly and sting like a bee," said Imam Zaman Marwat. "His physical ability defined him as an athlete, but his uniqueness was brought out more by his choice of religion. Muhammad Ali reminds us all of the role American Muslims have had and continue to play in our great nation. He was an advocate for justice and an advocate for truth. Muhammad Ali always served us as an ambassador for our faith."

[Muhammad Ali funeral: Watch the memorial for boxing legend](#)

Elmira physician Dr. Mushtaq Sheikh, a member of the Islamic Association, took part in Friday's service.

Ali was "the greatest" at more than just boxing, Sheikh said.

"He was not only a champion heavyweight fighter, but a champion of human rights and also civil rights," he said. "He claimed he was not going to go to war because it was against his religion as a Muslim. He lost his crown because of it. He stood his ground, and his crown was returned to him. He was a humanitarian and established an organization to help people with Parkinson's disease, Muslims and non-Muslims. We will miss him. He was a great man."

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