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HEADLINE: County Commissioners hail favorite son Dixon; State treasurer is honored as model rural leader

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BODY:

Everyone from a circuit judge to a Westminster radio announcer hailed state Treasurer Richard N. Dixon, Carroll County's favorite son, as a role model for African-Americans and others.

Mr. Dixon, the first black elected to a state constitutional post, was honored by the County Commissioners Thursday for his "13 years of service" as a member of Carroll's State House delegation.

The event at Martins Westminster marked one of the rare occasions when the commissioners have honored a resident. About 150 people attended the dinner.

"Tonight, we honor a man who has served his county, his state and his country with distinction and honor," said former Sen. Charles Smelser, a Carroll Democrat, whom Mr. Dixon credits with encouraging him to run for state office.

Mr. Dixon, 57, a former U.S. Army paratrooper captain, began his political career in 1970 when he was appointed to the Carroll school board. He won his first election to the State House in 1982 and was in the midst of his fourth term when he was elected by the General Assembly to replace the ill Lucille Maurer as treasurer.

Mr. Dixon often has been called a political anomaly because he was a black man representing a predominantly white county. But Dwight Dingle, general manager of radio station WTTR in Westminster who has known Mr. Dixon for about 20 years, said no politician was ever more electable in Carroll County than Mr. Dixon.

"He truly serves his constituents," said Mr. Dingle, who was master of ceremonies.

House Speaker Casper R. Taylor Jr., an Allegany Democrat whose political support was instrumental in securing Mr. Dixon the treasurer's seat, said Mr. Dixon "breaks all the molds. There's no truer conservative in the state of Maryland."

Mr. Taylor noted that Mr. Dixon honored his conservative constituents by rejecting membership in the legislative Black Caucus. As a result, that group only narrowly endorsed his nomination for the treasurer's post.

"No caucus or group is ever going to tell Richard Dixon how to make up his mind," Mr. Taylor said. "Richard Dixon will do Carroll County proud, will do the African-American community proud."

"He's the kind of leader we need to balance the metropolitan areas of the state. He exemplifies what rural Maryland is all about."

Also offering testimonials on Mr. Dixon's accomplishments were Sen. Larry E. Haines, a Westminster Republican; former Del. Richard C. Matthews; and Circuit Judge Raymond E. Beck, all of whom worked with Mr. Dixon in Annapolis.

The Carroll commissioners presented Mr. Dixon with an ink drawing of the State House and Robert Moton School, Mr. Dixon's alma mater and once the county's all-black school.

Mr. Dixon also was given a pewter plate engraved with the county seal and a proclamation acknowledging his long service on the school board and in the Assembly.

"I think you're one of the best role models in Carroll County, not only for your son, but for my son," Commissioner W. Benjamin Brown said.

Attending the event with Mr. Dixon were his wife, Grayson, his son, Timothy, sisters and other relatives, and his longtime campaign treasurer, Jackie Finch.

"I'm very thankful for this evening," said a teary-eyed Mr. Dixon, who spoke about his humble beginnings in the county and the work ethic his parents and others instilled in him.

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GRAPHIC: PHOTO, ALGERINA PERNA : SUN STAFF, "Breaks all the molds": Richard N. Dixon represented a mostly white county in the House before becoming first black state treasurer.

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