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A member of the 'Syracuse 8,' Lobon honored by town

By: Don Rully , Imprint Sports Editor

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A town resident for 34 years, Lobon speaks many languages. He is a finance and economic development official with the Connecticut Development Authority helping out cities and towns. He is director of the state's \$5 million Urban Bank.

He speaks the language of sports. He was and is an athlete. He was an All-State middle linebacker on a Weaver High School state championship football team in the 1960s. A football scholarship athlete at Syracuse University, it was in central New York that sprang inside of him another language.

What might strike the casual observer about Lobon's articulate manner is the lack of contradiction. He displays great self-esteem and confidence in civil rights, to a cause, which runs counter to what many young people and adults have been taught to believe via T.V. - that to stand up for a cause is to display your low self-esteem.

"When you stand for truth and justice, righteousness will prevail," Lobon told the Bloomfield Town Council on Monday night as well as a scattering of spectators at Town Hall. "I now see the light at the end of the tunnel."

The Town Council declared March 24 "John Lobon Day" in Bloomfield. A printed proclamation was read.

Town councilman Larry Merchant read extensively from an article that appeared in the Bloomfield Journal about Lobon. Previous to the article, Lobon and eight other football players which came to be known as the "Syracuse 8" were awarded the Chancellor's Medal honoring their boycott based on racial grounds that they were being discriminated against by the university football program led by head coach Floyd "Ben" Schwartzwalder. The players claimed they were provided less than adequate medical attention and that playing time was allotted unfairly because of race. The time was spring 1970 when Lobon said he was swept up in the intensity and attention of the civil rights movement. The Syracuse players were not allowed to wear Afros. They were referred to as 'boy' by the coaching staff.

Born in Hartford on March 26, 1950, Lobon will be married to his wife, Pamela, for 37 years in August. At the podium in the Town Hall chambers, he credited Mrs. Lobon and his mother, Lucinda Lobon. "I spent more time with others than my family but that was only because I had that support," Lobon said.

Lobon also is a member of the State Commission on Human Rights & Opportunities.

On Oct. 25, 2005, it was John Lobon Day in Hartford.

"It's not about me. It's about we," Lobon told the Bloomfield Journal on Tuesday afternoon. "In my life's journey I have stepped out on nothing and stepped onto something," Lobon said.

Lobon said he started at Syracuse "on the outside looking in." He said he decided to go to extend opportunity for others and "stand and keep the door open" for others.

"It wasn't black and white. It was about people," he said to the Town Council.

Lobon talked to the council and the Journal about the language of diversity, fairness, truth and responsibility.

"We let the system work and the system said we were right, yet we were still punished," Lobon said about the Syracuse '8'. Two of the players received a brief chance to play professional football with the Washington Redskins.

Lobon says today, "playing professional football would have been nice but it wasn't important."

Finally, Lobon referred to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as his wellspring of inspiration.

"I use him and his speeches to (give) me continuous motivation and continuous hope that we will have a better world someday," he said.

He pointed out that on April 6 on the History Channel there will be a two-hour special about King.

"And I'll be right there," Lobon said.

After his talk on Monday evening, Lobon was presented with a framed proclamation by Mayor Sydney T. Schulman who casually referred to Lobon as a groundbreaker that could have led NFL Indianapolis Colts superstar defensive end Dwight Freeney to Syracuse.

"As far as I'm concerned we're proud to have that gentleman be a resident of Bloomfield," Schulman said. "We would like to think that everyone had the guts, the intestinal fortitude to stand up for something they believe in. It's not true. It's true for Mr. Lobon."

Schulman gave Lobon credit for standing up for what's right despite the danger to himself, his education and his sports career.

A reception was held after the 25-minute ceremony and speech across from the Town Council chambers organized by town economic development director Deb Davis.

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