

Bobcats owner makes imprint on Charlotte sports

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me, this is not a one-person success story.

"This is a success story of a community coming together to bring the excitement of basketball back. It's the story of a community coming together to create an arena that becomes an economic statement and contributor, and an arena that becomes almost a community trust created to bring the fans and the community together."

Johnson does not want all the credit. The city, the black community eventually must come to grips with that. That said, Johnson must come to grips with the fact that people are not going to let him forget that he is giving Charlotte reason to hope. No matter what, he is considered the anti-Shinn, largely because he is going out of his way to make it known that he thinks and cares about the people here.

Although he plans to keep his permanent residence in the Washington, D.C., area, Johnson will not be your run-of-the-mill, absentee team owner. The finishing decorative touches are being put on his new uptown home at the extremely desirable address of The Rattcliffe, and Johnson said he will be in Charlotte "three or four times a month, sometimes more."

Opportunities knock

Johnson looks at his franchise and the \$265 million arena in which it will play starting in 2005 as financial opportunities for everyone. The Bobcats, Johnson said, already have 50 to 60

employees, and the number should grow to about 100 when the team begins play in 2004.

"We're already dealing with minority vendors and small businesses are getting contracts from us," Johnson said. "We've got accountants, we've got lawyers, we've got service vendors and operators. The arena going up right now - it's creating jobs, creating opportunities for minority subcontractors. Soon, we'll be a magnet to attract economic development: office buildings, shops, restaurants."

"The arena will create a downtown area where people spend more time downtown. So restaurants throughout the region will benefit, shops throughout the region will benefit. People will want to relocate their offices here because there's the excitement of a professional basketball team here, so that makes it attractive as a place to live and raise a family. The community will benefit, whether we're going out to do Read to Achieve, whether we're involved with the schools, whether we're involved with young athletes and having clinics."

Johnson also has announced plans to start a regional sports network, Bobcats Entertainment Sports Network, that he said will create additional job opportunities for young people interested in television.

"It will give exposure to colleges and high schools and other sporting events that are not on television on a

local and regional basis," Johnson said. "As long as we look at it as a broad vision of community spirit from sports, economic development from combined investments, and unity of a region from fan enthusiasm. It all has to work together."

Where credit is due

U.S. Rep. Mel Watt (D-N.C.) of Charlotte said even though Johnson doesn't want praise, he deserves it.

Watt agrees the city should cherish Johnson - and vice versa.

"He brings a whole new dimension to the city, in terms of quality business leadership," Watt said. "We've had some outstanding leaders in this city, especially in the area of education and things of that nature. But to have one of the most recognized business leaders in the country here is an outstanding thing for Charlotte. It doesn't surprise me that he doesn't want to be considered a savior. People who have it don't really have to flaunt it."



Watt

"I think people realize that there are only a few people who can play in that financial league that Bob plays in. But in order for him to be successful, he's got to have the community's best interests at heart. And, just as important, the community is going to have to be willing to reciprocate. Overall, I think having Bob Johnson as the new owner of the NBA team is a win-win situation."

It all coincides with the overall view over at Edwards' Barber Styling III. And the overall issue of Johnson and the Bobcats is an important one for 54-year-old Early Vaughters, the manager and de facto patriarch of the shop.

"I've lived here all my life, and I've seen this city when its chief resource was trucking," Vaughters said. "And I've seen it move to banking as its chief resource. Now, this team he's helped bring is going to give the people in Charlotte more opportunities to grow to new heights. Bob Johnson is a good man. A real good man."

People nod.

Johnson can buy a whole lot of things with his millions. Still, if he happens to forget his wallet one day, there is at least one place in Charlotte

where he could still get a haircut. *E-mail C. Jemal Horton at se-jemalwrite@aol.com*

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Honor roll of newsmakers

Bob Johnson's selection as newsmaker of the year puts him in select company. Since former U.S. Senate candidate Harvey Gantt's selection as the first in 1990, newsmakers have included politicians, members of the arts community and community activism.

Newsmakers are selected by The Post's editors based on the impact of individuals in setting the agenda for impact on the overall Charlotte community through accomplishments or issues during the year.

Pughsley

Previous newsmakers include:
2002 - Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Superintendent **James Pughsley**
2001 - Charlotte Housing Authority Executive Director **Harrison Shannon** and Charlotte Convention & Visitors Bureau President **Melvin Tennant**.

Sanford

2000 - Arts & Science Council Executive Director **Harriet Sanford**
1999 - Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Board Chairman **Arthur Griffin**

Sanford

1998 - Northwest Corridor Community Development Corp. Executive Director **Isaac Heard**

King

1997 - Attorney **James Ferguson**
1996 - Mint Museum official **Dawn Womack** and United Way of Central Carolinas director **Gloria Pace King**

King

1995 - Transamerica Insurance executive **Bill Simms**
1994 - Mothers of Murdered Offspring founder **Dee Sumpter**

King

1993 - Stop the Killing founder the Rev. **James Barnett**
1992 - U.S. Rep. **Mel Watt**
1991 - Charlotte Hornets coach **Gene Littles**
1990 - U.S. Senate candidate **Harvey Gantt**

Leadership Charlotte sponsors open house

By Herbert L. White
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Leadership Charlotte is recruiting for its 26th class.

An open house will be held Jan. 13 from 5:30 - 7 p.m. at the Sykes Building Rotunda in the McColl Graduate School of Business at Queens University of Charlotte. Anyone interested in applying is invited to attend the even. RSVP should be e-mailed to edie@leadershipcharlotte.org by Jan. 9.

Applications for Class XXVI will be accepted from Jan. 1 - Feb. 15. For information regarding the process, call Leadership Charlotte at (704) 688-2888, extension 2, or log on to www.leadershipcharlotte.org. Class XXVI begins in August 2004.

Leadership Charlotte develop and enhance volunteer community leadership by providing a diverse group of emerging and existing leaders with the opportunity to increase their community knowledge, civic network, and service to the community. Leadership Charlotte is a broad-based leadership development program that embraces inclusiveness.

Leadership Charlotte operates an annual, 10-month leadership development program in which participants meet with community leaders, explore issues impacting the Charlotte region and receives leadership skills training. Each class also takes on a service project.

Leadership Charlotte, which celebrated its 25th anniversary this year, is an independent organization.

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