

Local heroes

A vibrant community depends on people devoted to making it a better place.

Here are nine who are up to the challenge.

With Faith, Right Makes Might

In 1969, Syracuse attorney Faith Seidenberg walked into a Manhattan bar. An insignificant event except the place was the century-old McSorley's Old Ale House, a male enclave no woman had ever entered. Refused service, Seidenberg sued in federal court and won. New York's McSorley Law prohibits sexual discrimination in public places.

Twenty-five years later, Seidenberg still pushes the envelope for civil rights, taking on corporations, schools, businesses, and government institutions. Since 1963, she has headed her own firm—Seidenberg, Strunk and Goldenberg—in a renovated building on Syracuse's East Water Street. Here, red brick walls, bold Oriental carpets on oak floors, and mythological masks fortify distressed clients.

Last year, Seidenberg dropped criminal work to concentrate exclusively on civil rights. Despite an "enormous increase" in employment discrimination cases—she receives some 15 calls a week seeking help—Seidenberg takes only one in 100. Increasingly, she battles for female athletes and coaches suing colleges and



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faith
seidenberg

educational institution receiving federal funding.

In 1992, her target was Colgate University. Representing the women's

universities under Title IX, the 1972 law prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex for any

ice hockey club, she sued the Hamilton, New York, school, seeking varsity status. A federal magistrate judge ruled in the club's favor. When the university appealed and won, she says, "I was devastated." Undeterred, she now represents current members of the women's ice hockey club in a class action suit. "We'll win it next time,"

vows Seidenberg, who graduated from SU's College of Arts and Sciences in 1944 and College of Law 10 years later.

Against Cornell, however, Seidenberg triumphed quickly. When that university eliminated two women's teams, gymnastics and fencing, she filed suit. Cornell chose to reinstate both teams—with varsity status—before the case went to trial.

Seidenberg also represents a growing number of female coaches suing schools over unequal pay, schedules, equipment, and perks. A case pitting two female coaches against the State University of New York College at Oswego went to trial in April. The coaches say they were fired for their claims that the women's tennis courts were unplayable, the locker rooms deplorable, and the men's coaches better compensated.

Proving gender discrimination against female coaches is difficult. "It's not hard to prove if a school is out of compliance," Seidenberg explains. However, little precedence exists for cases involving coaches. "We're on the cutting edge," she says proudly.

Seidenberg began her career that way: working for voting rights in Mississippi and prisoners' rights in New York, representing draft card burners and the Congress for Racial Equality. She logged nine years at

Legal Aid before opening her own firm, initially a solo practice.

"I wanted to do it my way, make my own decisions," Seidenberg explains. Her partners, Bonnie Strunk and Liz Goldenberg, joined her as law school students. The firm also employs two female associates and a male paralegal.

Why do women dominate? "I wanted an all-female office to prove we could do it well," says Seidenberg.

—ELLEN PORTNOY ABELOVE

A Sporting Life

That Luke LaPorta's past is constantly bumping into his present pleases him to no end. "When I walk into a diner in Liverpool, 55-year-old men still come up and call me 'Coach,'" says LaPorta. "I get to see these guys as kids all over again. Even my wife gets a kick out of it."

LaPorta loves being a man about town, and nobody casts a bigger shadow in Syracuse sports circles than this constant whirlwind of activity.

LaPorta, who turns 70 in July, is involved in numerous athletic activities. He is a former regional director of the Empire State Games, an Olympic-style competition he helped launch in 1978 for New York State residents; an influential board member of the Syracuse Chiefs, the

minor league baseball affiliate of the Toronto Blue Jays; and chair of the board of International Little League Baseball, which oversees 2.8 million children from 185,000 teams in 79 countries, and its annual world series in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

LaPorta's Little League involvement dates back to 1950, when he organized Central New York's first league. On a more global scale, LaPorta helped Poland build its first baseball diamond in 1990. More recently, he and major league baseball Hall of Famer Stan Musial have been involved in the creation of a Poland-based training center for all of Europe. "Baseball's really taken off there," LaPorta says. "It's big, and we're helping build several more stadiums in addition to the training facility."

LaPorta played football at Syracuse, graduating from the College of Arts and Sciences in 1948. He earned a master's degree from the School of Education in 1950 and spent 31 years as a coach and athletic director at Liverpool High School. Though he's now a full-time fund-raiser for Syracuse University, he remains devoted to athletics, especially those involving young people.

"Athletics are a building block for kids," says LaPorta. "Any skill youngsters can gain and build upon will give

them a better self-image. Sports provide opportunities for success and learning. It's a great way to help kids."

—BOB HILL

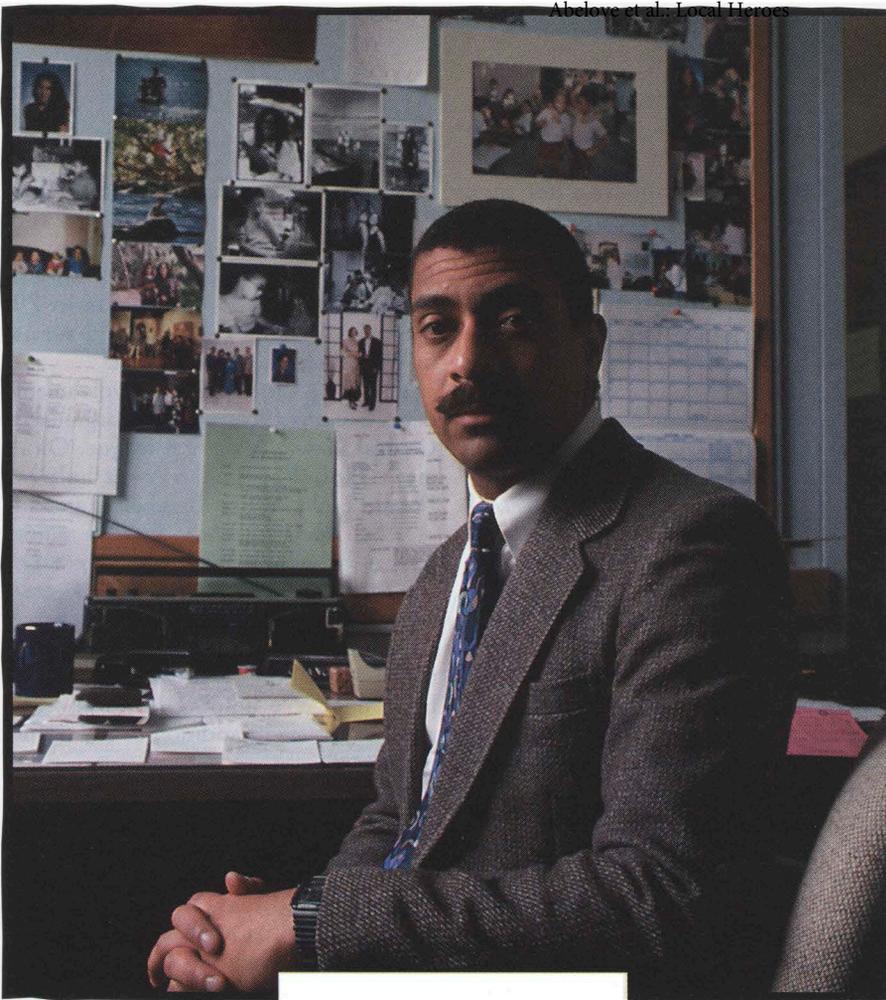
luke
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Principal of Change

Three years ago, Syracuse's Nottingham High School was plagued with racial tension, violence, and seemingly endless dissension among students and faculty. Enter Granger Ward, a young, dynamic principal who had created a positive atmosphere across town at Corcoran High School.

Ward, who was appointed Nottingham's principal in 1992, hopes that in another five years his school will be among the best in the nation—a lofty





granger ward

goal he feels is well within the school's reach.

Composed of a unique mixture of students (40 percent are African-American, 40 percent white, and 20 percent "other," including a large number of Southeast Asian, Latino, and Eastern European students), Ward believes the school is ripe for tackling what he calls the biggest challenge facing Central New York, and indeed many American school districts: managing change.

"I see my role as a facilitator of that change," says Ward. "We look at ways to make the teaching and the learning processes relevant to what's happening in our students' lives."

Ward is helping involve students in their education by creating opportunities for them at Nottingham.

Students in an 11th-grade English class are developing a reading program for preschool children. Students in a social studies class are learning about conflict mediation. Ward is also looking forward to developing similarly interactive programs in the sciences, math, and foreign languages.

"Involving students in real-life projects motivates kids and shows them why education is important," says

Ward, who received his bachelor's degree in biology from the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry in 1981 and his master's degree in science education from SU in 1984.

"It shows them that learning how to write better, collect facts, and clearly present information is necessary to get things done in the real world."

Slowly, Ward is trying to change the culture of his school with a mix of caring and control. By respecting his students, demanding the same in return, and being a firm disciplinarian (he's banned hats and Walkmans from the building), Ward tries to use the school's tradition of diversity and openness to its advantage.

"We're an urban school that has the diversity very, very few places have," he says. "I think we hold the hope for the future because such places cannot stay isolated forever."

—ANDREA C. MARSH

Mr. and Mrs. Syracuse

If you imagined the city of Syracuse held a giant homecoming dance and elected a king and queen, it's not inconceivable that Eric and Judy Mower would emerge as royalty for the day.

The Mowers are perhaps Syracuse's quintessential power couple, known as much for their volunteer involvement as their successful careers. Between the two of them, they've sat on nearly every board in town.

"We're not people to stand outside of what's going on or what needs to be done," says Judy, a management consultant who holds four SU degrees, the latest a 1984 doctorate in social psychology.

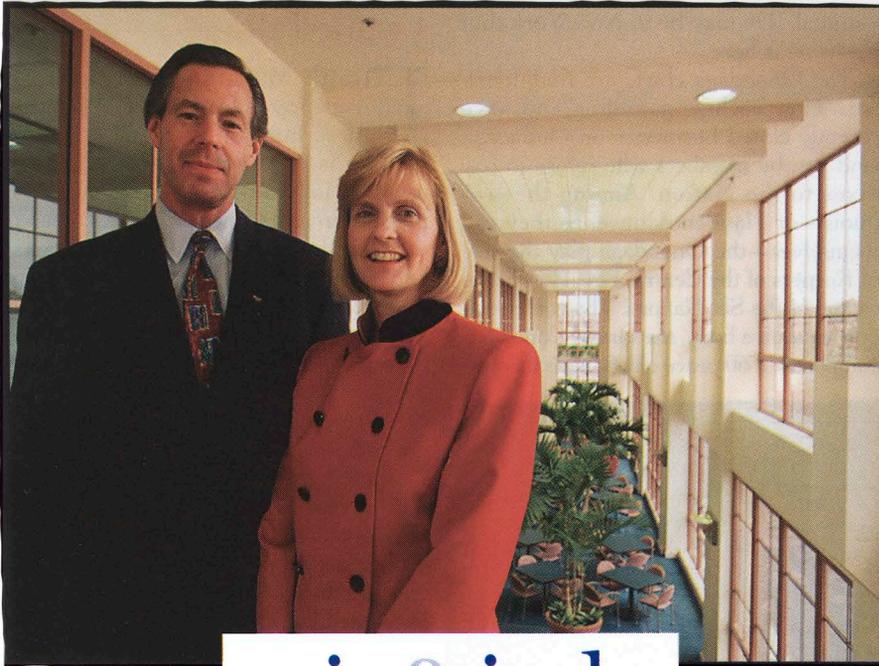
"I never think about being involved any more than I think about getting up in the morning, shaving, or having a cup of coffee. It's part of our life," says Eric, president of Eric Mower and Associates, the state's largest advertising and public relations agency outside Manhattan.

Not surprisingly, the two met as SU undergraduates through an extracurricular activity: student court. "I was chief justice and Judy was associate justice," says Eric, who earned his bachelor's degree in English in 1966 and a master's in public relations in 1968. The pair—he a Jew from Brooklyn, she a Methodist from a rural upstate town—were married in Hendricks Chapel in 1967. "Judy wore a white mini-dress. The wedding was like Ma and Pa Kettle meet the Goldbergs," jokes Eric.

They stayed in Syracuse, and began almost immediately acting on their civic responsibility as they forged their careers.

"Syracuse is a city that welcomes voluntarism and identifies and uses leadership where it happens to find it," says Judy. "There isn't as much connection between people's voluntarism and their social connections or power base as in some other cities."

Judy's six current board involvements include the Urban League, the Consortium for Children's Services (she's president), and Vera House, a shelter for battered women. Eric has chaired the boards of the Greater Syracuse Chamber of Commerce, the



eric & judy mower

Syracuse Symphony Orchestra, the Central New York Chapter of the National Kidney Foundation, and the Onondaga Partnership for the Arts.

Both are also committed to professional organizations and to SU: He chairs the academic affairs committee of the board of trustees; she's a member of the Maxwell School Advisory Board and the board of Library Associates. They were

honored this year as Central New York Fund Raisers of the Year by the National Society of

Fund Raising Executives.

"There's no mystery about voluntarism when you look at what you can accomplish, the benefits the community derives, the intellectual stimulation," says Eric. "A community, for better or worse, is the result of what the people who live there make it." —*RENÉE GEARHART LEVY*

The Five-Degree Guarantee

Three guesses: Where's the best place in the United States to be a weatherperson?

"There's never a dull moment in Syracuse," says Kathy Orr. "From a meteorological standpoint, it's fantastic."

She should know. As the weatherperson on WTVH, the CBS affiliate in Syracuse, Orr has her work cut out for her. But she's so sure of her predictions that her station guarantees them.

"We offer a five-degree guarantee," Orr explains. "I guarantee the temperature for the next day within five degrees, and if I'm off more than that, the station donates \$50 to a local school."

How did she do during the 1993-94 "winter from hell" in upstate New York? "Really well," she says modestly. "I'm rarely off more than twice a month."

Orr graduated in 1988 with a dual degree in television production and marketing. Her first job was in New York City with Nickelodeon, the children's television network. When it moved its operations to Florida, she returned to Syracuse, her hometown.

When she heard about an opening at WTVH for a weatherperson, she jumped at it. Two days after auditioning, she landed the job.

Then began the hard part: a three-year ordeal of full-time work and commuting to Oswego every day for classes leading to certification in meteorology.

On the job, Orr usually has plenty to talk about. Syracuse is the snowiest city in the country with more than 100,000 people, including Buffalo, Minneapolis, and Juneau, Alaska. The culprit? That infamous "lake effect" snow coming from Lake Ontario.

It takes Orr three hours to gather data for a broadcast. First she collects all the numbers ("the meteorology part") and then puts the information into the computers and translates it into graphics ("the TV part"). On air she never works with a script, just uses maps to guide her.

"I tell people if it were up to me, it would be 75 and sunny every day," says Orr. "But in Syracuse that's not going to happen. And you know—secretly, I'm glad." —*CAROL NORTH SCHMUCKLER*



kathy orr

Speaker of the House

Some people confuse the notoriety with the message," says Chief Oren Lyons. "I'm just the messenger. The message doesn't come from me. I bring it from my people."

Lyons is the faithkeeper of the Onondaga—one of the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy—whose territory lies a few miles south of Syracuse. During the last two decades, he has also emerged as an international

Council, "He may be in New York, but his heart is here."

The Onondaga chiefs are traditionalists. They eschew gambling and have recently closed businesses on Onondaga land run by members who refuse to pay taxes to the Nation. Among the Iroquois—or Haudenosaunee, as they call themselves—the Onondaga play the role of Keepers of the Central Fire, akin to the capital of the Six Nations. The confederacy's legislative body, the Grand Council, is composed of 50 peace chiefs, each theoret-

Frank Talk

Frank Malfitano is known as scrappy. He doesn't mind the description.

"This is one of the toughest jobs in town," Malfitano says, "but I've got a reputation as a fighter."

He'd better be. When he was recruited as executive director of downtown Syracuse's Landmark Theatre in 1990, he took over a facility that was in arrears on its utility bills, bereft of bookings, in a state of physical disrepair, and without any programming.

Malfitano turned it around in just four years. The nonprofit arts center now presents some 200 events a year, has secured more than \$2 million for operations and restorations, and balances its budget.

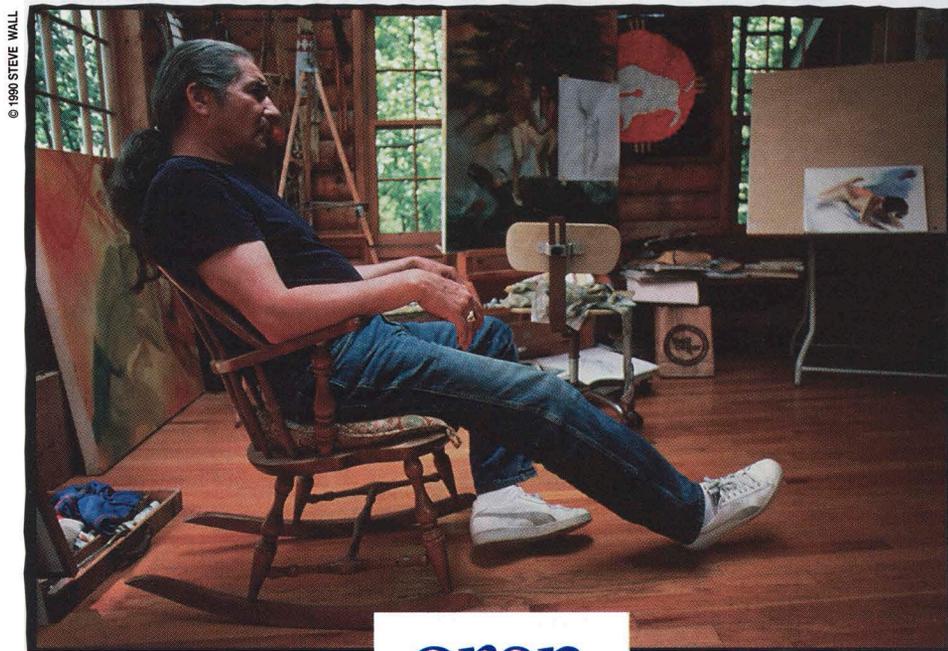
He's also instituted several high-profile annual events including the Syracuse Area Music Awards (SAM-MYS) for local musicians, an increasingly popular Jazz Fest, and the Syracuse Walk of Stars awards, which bring well-known native Syracuseans or SU alumni back to sign their names in stars embedded in the sidewalk. Honorees have included Dick Clark '51, Grace Jones, and Bob Costas '74.

The Landmark started life as a magnificent 1928 Indo-Persian movie palace. It barely escaped the wrecker's ball in 1977 to become reincarnated as a 2,896-seat community arts facility, but years of inexperienced management almost killed it.

A native Syracusean, Malfitano took over with an eclectic background that coalesced to make him the perfect person for the job. He'd gone from a 1972 SU degree in social work and public relations to experiences throughout the country in social services, journalism, broadcasting, advertising, concert promotion, and jazz festival producing. He "spoke fluent promoter," which was just what the Landmark needed to claw its way into the black.

Even though he's won dozens of awards, the pressure remains unrelenting. He seems to thrive on it.

"I have a vision of what I want the Landmark to accomplish. Whether I'm abrupt or aggressive is not impor-



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spokesman for indigenous peoples. He's met with presidents, United Nations dignitaries, foreign leaders, and innumerable journalists.

His message is simple, yet profound: Unless you respect the Earth, you destroy it. If you kill the water, you kill the life that depends on it. Think not of yourselves, but of future generations.

Lyons calls it common sense. Natural law.

Lyons hasn't always lived on the reservation. He was recruited to SU by former lacrosse Coach Roy Simmons Sr., who had seen him play the Iroquois game. A goalie, Lyons became an All-American, and graduated in 1958 with a bachelor's degree in fine arts. He spent 10 years in Manhattan as a commercial artist before he was "raised up" as a chief and returned to his homeland.

"My clan mother told the Grand

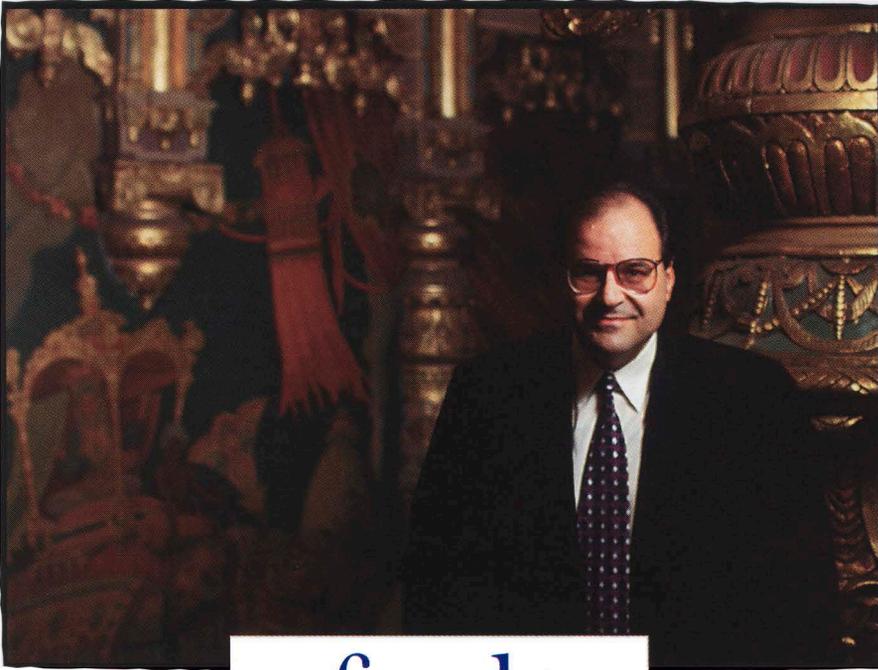
ically representing a family lineage within his own nation.

Lyons's role as a member of the Council is both an honor and a burden. There is

no financial compensation, so Lyons must have a second job to make a living. There is little time to devote to his art. "My greatest sadness," he says.

Lyons is director of Native American studies at the State University of New York at Buffalo, a program he helped start in 1970. One day he might be in Buffalo teaching, the next arranging a meeting between Native leaders and Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt to discuss the status of treaties.

He insists his role as spokesman for his people is a reflection of his education and command of the English language, something unique in the native population. Says Lyons, "I can talk to the white man." —RENÉE GEARHART LEVY



frank malfitano

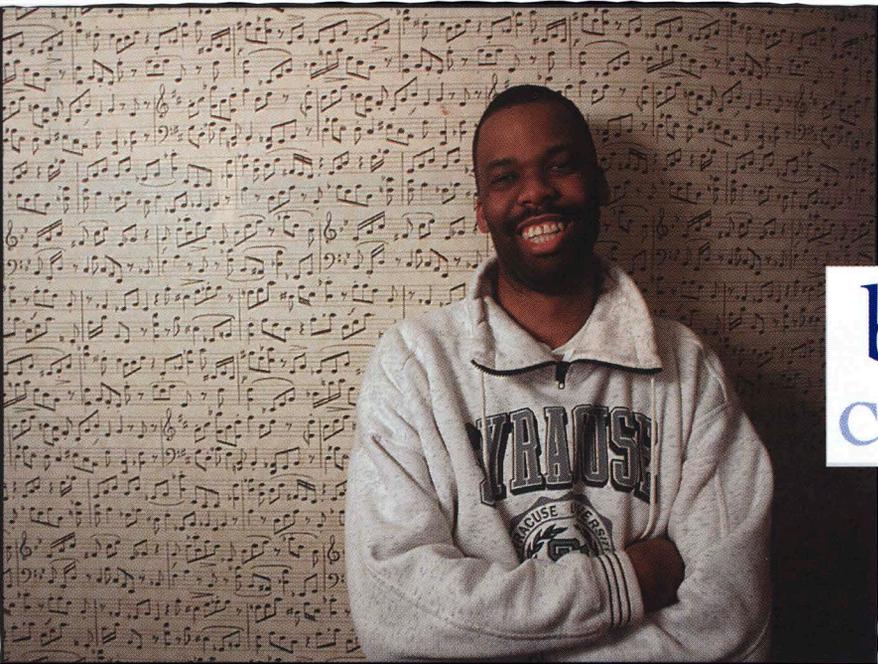
tant. What matters is whether I can maintain a diversified menu of community and cultural programming that keeps this facility alive.

"It's a constant battle for funds, audience, and usage," Malfitano says with a shrug. "I'm blazing new paths and the bottom line is that I get the job done."

What's the next step? "Some people think in a very linear fashion, plan their lives out, and stay in one career track for decades. That has not been the course of my life.

"I don't know that I'm going to stay here forever. But I'm an old Boy Scout. Hopefully, I'll leave the campsite in better shape than I found it."

—CAROL NORTH SCHMUCKLER



butch charles

unnoticed. Other local stations have adjusted their formats to compete.

Charles doesn't mind. "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery," he says. "It just shows we're making an impact."

—JENNIFER BARTOK

WOLF Man

Any Syracusan worth his or her salt can tell you AM 1490 WOLF is a radio station with a history of offering Syracuse a variety of sounds. Since 1951, the station has entertained Central New York with various formats—pop, oldies, contemporary tunes. In 1991, however, close friends Butch Charles and WOLF owner Craig Fox decided to fill a void in local radio by bringing urban contemporary music to the city.

"There was nothing in terms of urban contemporary on the air," says Charles. "I felt it would be in the public's interest."

While WOLF's content is primarily targeted toward African-American listeners, jazz, blues, and gospel lovers also find the station meets their listening desires.

Charles, who earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from SU in 1980 and a master's in television and radio in 1981, begins his day teaching at the State University of New York College at Oswego, where he is an assistant professor in the communications studies department, then heads off to WOLF to take on the role of station manager. He is responsible for every aspect of operation "from FCC requirements to our advertisers' requirements to the listeners' requirements," he says.

With more than 20,000 listeners, WOLF has found its niche, serving the community not only through music, but community involvement. By sponsoring events like forums, fashion shows, and parties, WOLF bolsters attendance through advertising and promotions. Charles believes such involvement is an integral part of WOLF's existence. "When people hear

about an event on WOLF, it gives it a certain validity," he says.

That WOLF has found its market in the community has not gone