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LOCAL NEWS

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West Point honors Anderson's lifetime of achievement

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Correspondent

Bloomfield Township resident Joseph B. Anderson Jr. has capped his illustrious lifetime achievements with the most prestigious award his alma mater, the U.S. Military Academy, awards to graduates. In May, he received the Distinguished Graduate Award in recognition of his character, distinguished service and his personification of West Point values. He was one of six graduates to receive recognition.

A soft-spoken, humble and articulate gentleman, Anderson described his life experiences and his opportunities to develop and use his leadership abilities. He explained that the progress of his career coincided with business and industry efforts to include African Americans in leadership roles.

Anderson's leadership qualities appeared early when, as a high school student in Topeka, Kan., he was chosen to represent his high school at Boys State. From there, he was chosen to represent Kansas at the national Boys State in Washington, D.C.. A post card arrived a few weeks later from West Point, saying that he was just the kind of person it was wanting to recruit. He entered West Point in the class of '65 as one of six African-American cadets, one of four who graduated. Throughout his time there, he had leadership roles. He was also on the football team until sustaining an in-

jury, plus he was the lead baritone in the glee club.

While on his two tours of duty in Vietnam, a documentary film was made by French filmmakers featuring his platoon. "I could speak French, having studied it at West Point," Anderson said. Titled "The Anderson Platoon," this graphic presentation of the war won both an Emmy and an Oscar as best foreign documentary. It can be seen on YouTube. During his time in Vietnam, Lt. Anderson, 24, was awarded two Silver Stars, five Bronze Stars and 11 Air Medals.

"It was a mixed experience," Anderson said. "Sometimes it was calm and sometimes we were in a big fight. My training and leadership experiences served me well. I returned to Fort Dix, N.J., and was an aide de camp to a general. I served in Cambodia and then went to UCLA to earn two master's degrees. Next, I taught at West Point as an assistant professor from 1973-76. I was selected as a White House fellow and worked in the Department of Commerce for a year under Carter and Secretary Juanita Kreps."

All of these experiences made General Motors motivated to recruit Anderson at a time when the auto industry was interested in having African Americans in management positions. Anderson was manager of the Pontiac Stamping Plant from 1981-84. He was sent to the Harvard Manage-



Joseph Anderson Jr. as a young West Point cadet. Soon after graduation, he served in Vietnam. A documentary film, "The Anderson Platoon" was made and it won an Emmy and Oscar as best foreign documentary.



Joseph Anderson Jr. has been a trailblazer throughout his career. He recently was honored at West Point with its prestigious Distinguished Service Award for radiating the values of the U.S. Military Academy through his activities as a soldier, business leader and volunteer.

ment Program and returned to executive positions with General Motors.

"In 1992, I became an serial entrepreneur, eventually owning 12 companies," Anderson said. "I now own four. I am one of the Black En-



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The West Point awards ceremony for the prestigious Distinguished Service Award included retired Gen. Larry R. Jordan, Chairman of the Board of the Association of Graduates; Joseph Anderson, Lt. Gen. Robert Caslen, superintendent of West Point; and behind them retired Col. Robert L. McClure, president and CEO of the Association of Graduates.

terprise largest owners of businesses. I serve on New York Stock Exchange companies' executive boards. The timing made me a candidate to be in the transition of race in America to serve in executive and board leadership positions. I

now mentor many African Americans who are entering leadership roles in business and industry."

Anderson is a supporter of the Horizons Upward Bound program at Cranbrook, which nurtures high school

students for success in college. Among his other areas of service, he is on the Detroit branch of the Federal Reserve Bank board.

"I've had opportunities to be a trailblazer in many areas," he said.

In the Birmingham area, Anderson was the first African-American member of Oakland Hills Country Club. His friend Terry Page, former president of the club, remembers that upon learning that Anderson was interested in joining, he was welcomed into membership. Anderson noted that there has never been one negative incident in his years of membership.

Page, along with Birmingham-area West Point graduates Walter Oehrlein and Mitchell Bonnett, attended Anderson's West Point award ceremony. "It was probably the most impacting impression I have had about what is great about America. I was very moved. There were tears running down the cheeks of those in the reviewing stands as the 4,000 cadets marched by to honor the awardees," Page said.

Oehrlein and Bonnet commented upon the amazing mystique and attachment they have for West Point and their entire class: "Seeing our classmate Joe Anderson honored gives us a great feeling of pride in what we affectionately call 'Our Band of Brothers.' This was a very special time for us and our fellow cadet, Joseph Anderson. We are very proud of him."