

THE PHILADELPHIA TRIBUNE

Thursday, January 31, 2002

Tyraine Ragsdale, aka 'Grand Hank,' combines science with some hip-hop

By Ayana Jones
Tribune Staff Writer

For Tyraine Ragsdale, the combination of hip-hop music and science education has proven to be a potent recipe for success.

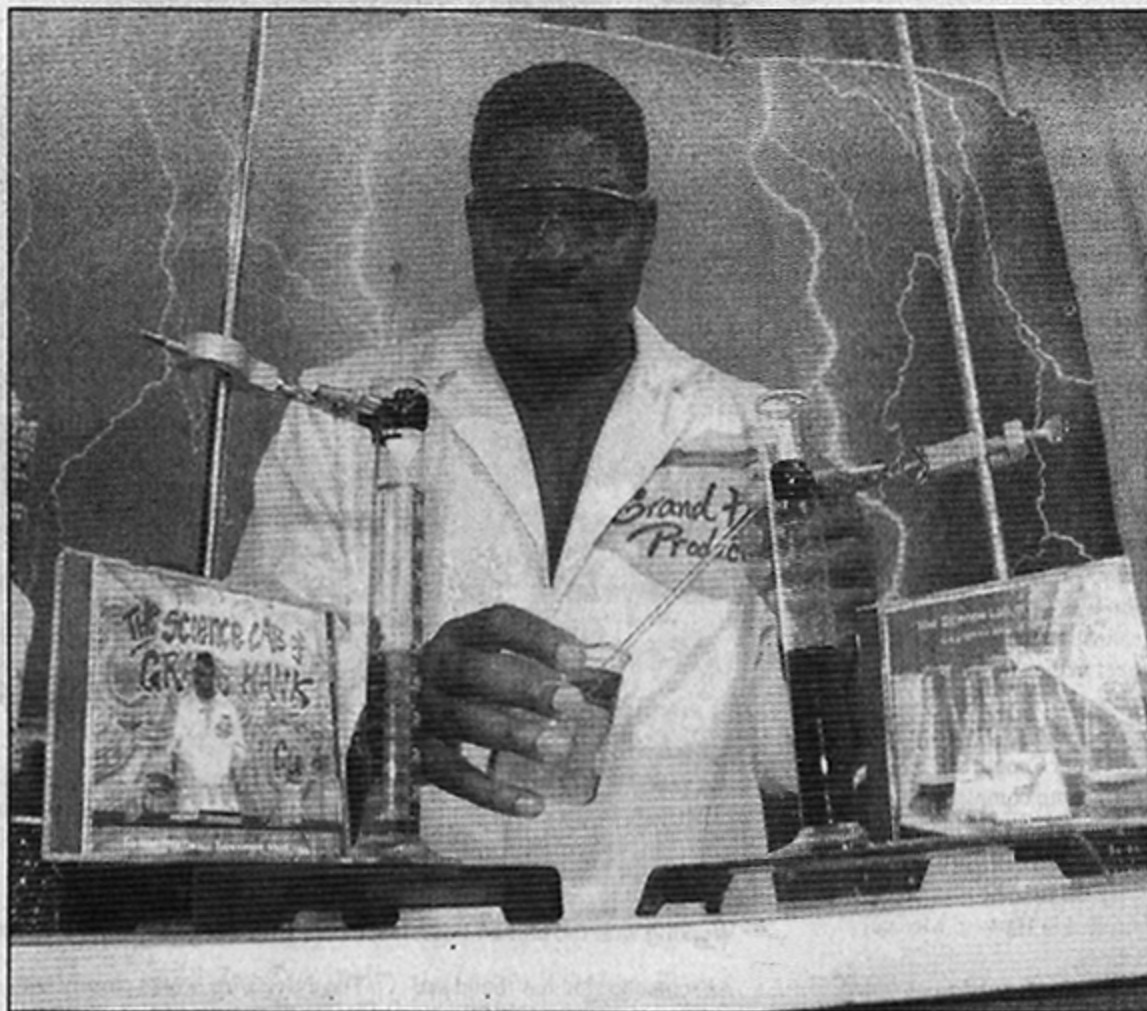
Also known as "Grand Hank" — the chemist/rapper/entrepreneur is the founder and president of Grand Hank Productions — a Philadelphia-based company that focuses on increasing the interest of students in education and marketing educational products.

Ragsdale, 36, is gearing up for the sixth season of his popular television series — "The Science Lab of Grand Hank."

Produced by Grand Hank Productions in collaboration with the School District of Philadelphia, Ragsdale's live and interactive show which incorporates hip hop culture, music and science, will air at 2 p.m., Wednesdays from Feb. 6 through April 21, on Channel 52, Comcast and Urban Cable Networks.

Ragsdale is opening the season with a premiere party at 6 p.m. Feb. 1 at the Franklin Institute Science Museum.

Operating on the premise that "anybody can be a scientist, including you," Ragsdale uses his background as a chemist and a rapper to break science concepts down so that they can relate to everyday life. His lessons are usually developed around the National Standards for Science Education. Each show



Grand Hank knows that science and hip-hop music is a successful combination. —ABDUL SALAM PHOTO

features special guest Master of Ceremonies (MC's) and disc jockeys (DJ's), which help him with his experiments.

"We bring to light that education can be exciting and fun," Ragsdale commented. "We are trying to elevate science and education to a point where people can see that it is worth pursuing."

He says that the program is so

effective because it helps to remove students' fears about science.

The rapper chose to fuse hip-hop with science education because he knows that it is a way to reach youth.

Ragsdale also appears on the Science of Philadelphia television series, which is designed to increase the interest and enrollment

of students in the areas of science and technology.

During the show, Ragsdale and Ambra Hook from the School District of Philadelphia Office of Curriculum Support for Science Education present students with lessons and experiments in ways that are entertaining.

As a spin off from his television series, Ragsdale takes his message

beyond the screen and directly into the classroom during his Science Lab tours.

"It puts a real life image on science," Ragsdale commented, noting that many of the children that he has encountered while touring have never seen a living Black scientist.

He wants the kids to know that they have a choice to pursue a career in science.

He also has an Educational Rap Lecture (ERL) tour for students which is a traveling assembly program that combines rap music with motivation power talks about various subjects like English, language arts, history and science.

Recognizing that many teachers may experience difficulty when teaching science, Grand Hank Productions also offers professional development workshops for teachers.

The goal of the workshops is to take teachers and train them on how to teach science more effectively.

Grand Hank Productions also has a non-profit entity titled The Knowledge Factor. The Knowledge Factor was developed to start after school science programs to further sharpen students' science skills by getting into real in-depth theories about the subject. According to Ragsdale, there are currently operating programs at the Universal Charter School and Harambee Institute.

It was during his college days at the University of Pittsburgh that Ragsdale committed himself to

helping others grasp the concept of science.

Ragsdale, who grew up in Mill Creek Projects and attended University City High School admitted that science didn't come easily for him at first. After enrolling in college, Ragsdale found that he didn't have the tools that he needed for his science courses. At one point, he thought that he didn't have the aptitude for the subject.

"My advisor told me to pursue something else," Ragsdale admitted.

"That triggered something in me."

He "retooled" himself by going back and studying the fundamentals of science. And once he mastered it he became unstoppable.

He went on to be the only African-American in his graduating class to obtain a degree in chemistry.

He wants youth to realize that science doesn't have to be that hard of a subject.

Founded in 1990, Grand Hank Productions is making strides and growing. Ragsdale has plans to push it to higher heights.

"What I see is us building a conglomerate of companies all under the umbrella of education," Ragsdale says.

"We want to become the preeminent companies when it comes to science education," Ragsdale concludes.

"We want to conduct research studies, probe the impact of music on education and probe how music can be used to help students."