



Tyraine Ragsdale enjoys the challenges of chemistry and rap music

## Rapper takes unique message to the people

By Tonya Pendleton

Tribune staff

Tyraine Ragsdale is a research chemist at R.W. Johnson Pharmaceutical Research Institute. His appealing, boyish face and outgoing personality belie the serious and scholarly stereotype of a scientist.

Grand Hank is a rapper. He, too, defies stereotypes. Though raised in West Philadelphia's Mill Creek projects, he is a college graduate pursuing a successful career.

His rap shows have received standing ovations from typically jaded college, high school and junior high school kids. He's even been featured on several television shows.

Tyraine Ragsdale and Grand Hank are the same person. Ragsdale dons the persona of Grand Hank when he presents the Educational Rap Lecture, an energetic rap show and lecture designed to interest young people in science.

How does he reach them? Simple. He talks to kids in a language they can understand.

"(I) stand up before them and allow them to challenge it," he says of his show. "I ask the question, how many of you are for brotherhood or for the upliftment of our people? Everybody raises their hand. (I then ask) How can I be for the upliftment

of my people if at the same time I have someone on stage trying to teach me yet I'm trying to put him down? That seems like a contradiction to me.

"Now let's see if I'm clear. How many people are interested in the upliftment, and then you get them on your side. Just make them think and stand up in front of them...?"

"One mechanism children use is they reject everything... anything new they don't want to hear it... I don't allow them to do that... The audience doesn't have control. As long as I have a sound system that can out-amplify them they have to listen."

Ragsdale, 26, has targeted some of the toughest schools in the city. And he's dealt with some of the toughest kids. If you're skeptical about the response he receives from an already video-saturated young audience, well, you'll have to see his show.

Ragsdale's alter ego has handled potentially disruptive elements with ease. After all, he too, has had similar experiences.

Ragsdale is one of eight children raised in the projects. Though his family survived, they were not untouched by urban problems: one member was involved with drugs. The family rallied behind him, and in han-

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