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## Rapping chemist uses musical formula to make science likeable to kids

By Kristen A. Graham

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Grand Hank, self-proclaimed world heavyweight champion of science, is donning his funky green safety goggles, bouncing from foot to foot, nodding as his assistant explains why it's important to keep safe in the lab.

"Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to 'The Science Lab of Grand Hank!' " the champ says over a thumping rap beat, scratching invisible records.

And, via live television, Tyraine Ragsdale, better known by his DJ name, Grand Hank,

is off. He's rapping, performing experiments, throwing out terms like "centrifugal chromatography" and generally exhorting his audience of high school students to love science.

"You, too, can be a scientist!" he shouts. "Everybody can be a scientist!"

Ragsdale, 43, a burly, gregarious chemist, knows the lines by heart. For the last two decades, he has been reaching out to students around the region, combining his two loves, music and science, to inspire young people to dream big.

This month, Ragsdale won

the George Washington Carver Award, given annually to someone who has displayed outstanding accomplishments in the field.

"Hank is an excellent motivator," said Ambra Hook, a science administrator for the Philadelphia School District and member of the committee that picked Ragsdale for the award. "He has a way of connecting all the things the kids are interested in and he knows how to make science fun."

It's a big deal to a kid who grew up in the Mill Creek housing project in West Philadel-

phia, someone who failed his first few chemistry classes but knew that school was his ticket to good things.

"I grew up knowing what not having an education could do for you," said Ragsdale.

After graduating from University City High School and earning a degree in chemistry at the University of Pittsburgh, Ragsdale worked as a research scientist for Johnson & Johnson.

While at Pitt, he was struck by the lack of African Americans in the field. He vowed he'd do something to fix that.

He found his chance about 20

years ago, working with a program that sent scientists into classrooms. While lecturing a group of bored children about what he did, he had an epiphany.

"I could see them fading in and out," he said. "It was just words to them. So I started rapping, using the beat of one of the songs they were familiar with. That just got them."

Back in college, Ragsdale was Grand Master Hank, "a pretty big-time DJ," he'll tell you proudly. He favors raps about famous Black scientists and

Please turn to **KIDS 3C**



**TYRAINE RAGSDALE**  
*Rapping Chemist*