

## Common

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He said he was 12-years-old when he wrote his first rhymes, which expressed his love of hip hop culture. He gave the Wake Forest audience a taste of his first creation — rapping what he could remember of it. The two-time Grammy winner said that he found his path in life through hip hop.

"It was something that I found, that I discovered myself, it really became my voice," said Common. "It became a way for me to contribute to the world."

He was known as "Common Sense" when he released his first album in 1992. He later shortened the name after a legal dispute arose when a musical group that was also called Common Sense protested. He said the name change was for the better. He feels the name Common is appropriate for his every-man musical style.

"It actually started being prophetic because I feel my music was for the everyday people anyway," said Common.

Common, whose acting credits include "Just Wright," "American Gangster" and "Wanted," got personal with the Wake audience. He told them he still doubted himself and his abilities even after he had scored several hits and sold millions of CDs. He attributed part of his insecurity to his breakup with former girlfriend Erykah Badu, with whom he won a 2003 Grammy for Best R&B Song for "Love of My Life (An Ode to Hip-Hop)."

## Taylor

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Minority and Women Business Enterprise program (M/WBE), said he supports Taylor's proposition.

"I feel that it's a wonderful, great idea, and we should have it," said Gonzales, a former business owner and Los Angeles native. "I commend Council Member James Taylor for his tremendous effort because we certainly need as much minority participation as possible and this is a step in that direction."

Gonzales said the M/WBE program, which he has led since 1997, once certified local M/WBE businesses to verify that they were in fact minority- or female-led, and had over 400 qualifying M/WBE companies on its roster before the state took over the certification process. He believes instituting a 10 percent minimum requirement is fair.

During a Feb. 21 City Council meeting, Taylor voted against an Asphalt and Plant Soil Remediation project that was up for consideration — because it had a seven percent M/WBE participation goal — and moved to implement a minimum requirement of 10 percent for all future contracts. Taylor says he routinely votes against city contracts that do not have at least a 10 percent participation goal.

"I will continue to vote no, as a protest until we get this thing done," he said.

The Council was split down the middle on the issue. Mayor Pro Tempore Vivian Burke, Molly Leight and Derwin Montgomery sided with Taylor, while Council members Dan Besse, Robert Clark, Denise "DD" Adams and Wanda Merschel dissented.

Adams said she needs more information before she can decide if implementing a minimum participation requirement is a responsible choice for the city.

"I'm not against passing



Rapper Common enters Wait Chapel.

Photos by Todd Luck

In his relationship with Badu and others, Common said he used to always take the backseat.

"I was willing to play second fiddle, that means you're giving your life for someone else," said Common.

He said he was inspired by his friend and fellow rapper Kanye West, who he said "has no problem believing in himself." Common started to use what he called the "Muhammad Ali Theory," that if one believes they're the greatest, they will make

it happen.

The Ali Theory has worked well for Common. He credited it with helping him to land his first acting job in the action film "Smokin' Aces." Common's acting stock has risen in recent years, so much so that he now competes for roles against Hollywood A-listers.

"Now when I'm going out for films, you know it's like they're pitting me up against, putting me in the box with

the percentage goals, but I am taking a stand that we need to hear from the people that are impacted the most, and that is the minority contractors themselves," she stated. "...Since we're going to make this quantum leap, I want to make sure it's right."

Mayor Allen Joines cast the deciding vote against Taylor's motion, requesting that the issue be reviewed by a committee before further action is taken by the Council. The city must be able to demonstrate that any minimum participation requirements it sets are "reasonable and verifiable," and not just arbitrary numbers, Joines explained.

"I'm very much in favor of setting a minimum, but the city attorney warned us if we set it without documentation, we could jeopardize the whole M/WBE program," said the mayor. "...I thought it was just premature to be voting on it."

The issue is now under review by the Housing/Community/General Government Committee led by Council Member Dan Besse, and Joines expects the Council will be prepared to revisit it sometime in April.

"The city manager believes we can come up with the documentation necessary to get to the 10 percent (minimum requirement)," said Joines. If that happens, "I will support that wholeheartedly. I have always been a huge supporter of the M/WBE program."

Adams believes there are many factors that contribute to the low level of minority participation in city contracts. She said she is glad to see the disparity get some attention.

"I'm glad we're going back to committee with this and we're getting more people involved with it," she said. "We need some other voices to give us input on this at a level that we've never done."

Wait Chapel, Common signed autographs for his many fans in attendance.

Wake Forest student De'Noia Woods was among those who met the rapper. She said she's a Common fan because she identifies with his music and likes the fact that his lyrics make her think. She, too found inspiration in Common's speech.

"It was really empowering because you think about greatness, but you never really put it into words," said Woods.

Wake Forest's Multicultural Affairs Office sponsored Common's appearance. Jonathan Cox, the assistant director of the Office, said Common was an ideal choice to speak to students because of his broad appeal and positive message.

"We try to do a lot of programs that bridge the gap between students of color and white students," said Cox, pointing out the diverse crowd that attended the speech.

The Office also sponsors the Journeys to Success speaker series, which brings successful African-Americans to campus such as television producer James DuBose and Max Siegel, the highest-ranking black executive in NASCAR history.

Before he left Wake's

Will Smith and Jamie Foxx," said Common. "Let's be realistic. I'm not knocking Will Smith out of the box right now, but I will one day."

After his remarks, he took questions from an audience of mostly college students. Several said they were going through some challenges in their lives and thanked him for inspiring them with his words. One student rapped for Common, which he said always happens during his Q&As. Another asked Common to perform a brief improvised rap with him, which Common graciously agreed to do.

## Sheriff's Office picks top staffers

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORT

The Forsyth County Sheriff's Office has named three employees "Staff Members of the Year" for 2010.

Deputy J. L. Koontz of the Office's Patrol Division was honored for serving as a mentor to a North Davidson High School senior, whose senior project focused on the training and daily duties of a law enforcement K9 Officer. The student was so impressed with the time he spent with Koontz that the student has been accepted into a Criminal Justice Program and plans to follow in the deputy's footsteps.



Koontz

Corporal W. Bright, who works in intake at the Forsyth County Detention Center, was cited for her quick thinking last year. She was inventorying property of a new inmate and discovered a manila envelope containing jewelry, including two 2006 ACC Champion rings from Wake Forest University. She checked the inside of the rings and discovered they were inscribed with the names of WFU basketball players.



Bright

Cpl. Bright advised her commanding officer about the discovery. After a thorough investigation, it was determined the rings were authentic and had been stolen.

Portia Walker, a civilian staffer who works in the Day Reporting Center, was selected for starting a tutoring program to help Center clients read.



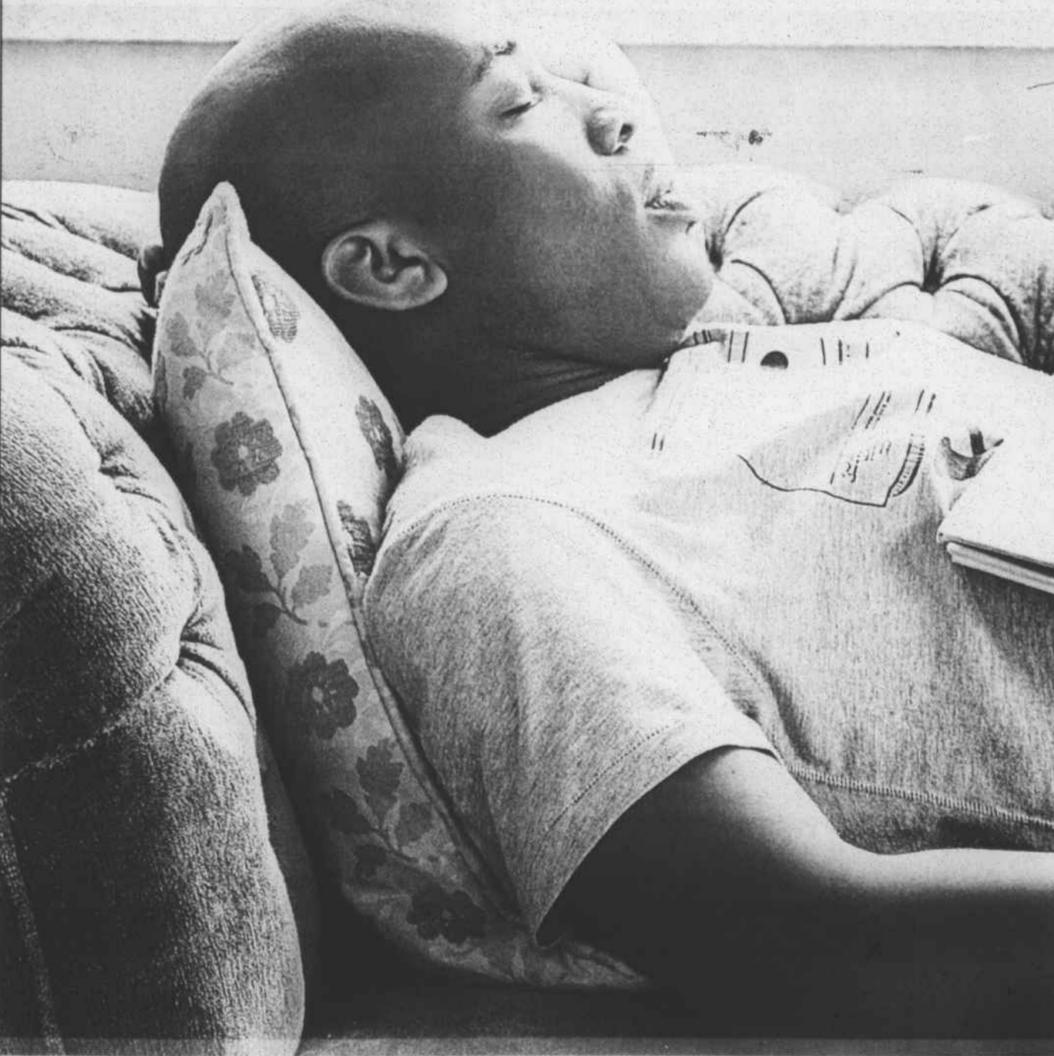
Walker

Walker, a member of the Day Reporting Center (DRC) team since 1996, recognized that many of the center's clients were illiterate or were functioning on a low reading level.

She volunteered to attend a United Way literacy training program and began tutoring clients weekly.

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