



Elliott Lowery and Lora Smith in a scene from "Life Happens."

Submitted Photos

## Local performers take center stage

*"Life Happens" tells of one family's fight to keep faith alive*

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

The faith of a family is tested in "Life Happens," a musical by Sharon Evans that was staged July 27-28 at Mineral Springs Middle School.

The play begins in the office of successful businessman Henry Chamberland (Elliott Lowery) as he gloats over his success. The gloating stops when his supervisor (Donna Duckett) lets Chamberland know that he has been downsized from the company. Chamberland



Sharon Evans

is so distraught, two police officers (Justin Lynch and Delmar Penn) are required just to remove from his office.

At home, Henry and his wife Denise Chamberland (Lora Smith) argue. Henry takes up a blue collar job

during work hours and alcoholism during leisure hours. Torn by Henry's lack of responsibility, Denise turns to her pastor Fredrick Watkins (Jeff Clark) and her friends Brenda Lockett (LaShonda Redd) and Jewel Jaminson (Demetris "Dee" Young).

The couple's daughters Sherry (Precious Dunston) and Rachael (JaNada Ervin) have their own issues. Sherry is trying to steer her sister back in the right direction after she discovers that Rachael has turned to gang members Shemika (Sierra Duckett) and Iesha (Andrian "Dia" Dawkins) for support. Sherry, a college graduate, finds comfort in her relationship with Jerome Winclaire (Kevin Caesar). Sherry and Jerome find that they share a lot more in

common during a dramatic twist ushered in by Violet Wiles (Donna Duckett).

The show, directed by Elliott Lowery, also features Justin Lynch as the voice of Jesus and live musician Tracey Brown (bass/drums) and Kenneth Graves (key-board) and Shanta McCoy (saxophone). The show was produced by Sharon Evans Productions in conjunction with Lowery's Christian Theatre Alliance.

### Smith

From page A1

area but is not actually involved in the case — on Smith's behalf. After two closed sessions, the Council opted not to.

"The City Council consulted with the City Attorney and her staff regarding the request. After careful and thorough deliberations, the Winston-Salem City Council, on the advice of the City Attorney, has decided to refrain from filing an amicus brief," read an August 10 statement from the City of Winston-Salem. "The City Council's opinion of the merits of Calvin Michael Smith's petition for a writ of habeas corpus would not be legally relevant to the federal court's review of the petition."

The decision was supported by the majority of the members, but it was the wrong choice for the Council, Montgomery believes.

"Because this case is in the courts, some have stated that intervening is not the role of the city. I must beg to differ," he said in a statement. "This city, through the incompetent investigation led by D.R. Williams and his questionable tactics, failed Jill Marker and Calvin Smith in its investigation. I believe if this city has impeded justice, it must do everything it can to right such a wrong, no matter at what stage it intervenes..."

Montgomery said he felt it was important to voice his opposition to his colleagues on the Council in this matter.

"It is the thought that this is the viewpoint and the thoughts of the entire Council, and to me, that does not capture at all how I felt about that," he said. "Whether he (Smith) is innocent or guilty ... we can all state that the investigation was truly flawed and could have absolutely led to the wrong person being incarcerated."

Mayor Pro Tempore Vivian Burke said she thinks the Council did the right thing in opting not to file the brief on Smith's behalf.

"If I felt that the officer and detectives who investigated this case had done something intentionally wrong and had a mean spirit about himself against someone (Smith), I could have looked at it differently, but I saw him investigating the case," she stated. "If there was a mistake, it was up to the attorney to take care of his client and bring that into the court."

Many have likened the Smith case to that of Darryl Hunt, who was incarcerated for nearly 20 years for a murder he did not commit. That case also involved a black, male defendant and a white, female victim. Shoddy police work has been blamed by many for Hunt's conviction. DNA evidence eventually led to Hunt's freedom.

Burke, who chairs the city's Public

Safety Committee, doesn't see a direct connection between the two cases.

"He was pardoned by the state," she said of Hunt. "They clearly saw that an error had been made in sentencing him."

Montgomery said he didn't know whether the brief would make a difference in Smith's request for a new trial, but he believes the city's connection to wrongful convictions in the past should not be overlooked.

"In fitting with that history, I think we should be much more sensitive," he remarked. "...If we don't do it, we'll never know if it could have helped."



Taylor



Burke

Council Member James Taylor, who served as vice chair of the Silk Plant Forest Citizen Review Committee (SPFCRC) the Council established to review the WSPDs investigation of the case, also said he was "not happy" with the Council's decision not to file a brief.

"I studied this for a year and six months of my life, so this is something I'm making an informed decision about," he said of his stance. "If Calvin didn't do it, then the assailant is still out on the streets and that bothers me. I don't think anybody knows what happened, but based on the information that I've seen, it appears that we may have an innocent man in prison."

The city's official statement said it wasn't the place of Council members to weigh in on the specifics of a criminal proceeding.

"The Winston-Salem City Council recognizes that it is not within its jurisdiction to: (1) determine the guilt or innocence of Calvin Michael Smith; (2) instruct the court system (state or federal) on how to conduct a review of any proceeding before it; or (3) instruct the Attorney General of the State of North Carolina regarding the handling of any criminal matter," the statement reads.

Although the Silk Plant Forest Citizen Review Committee reported that it found "no credible evidence" that Smith was at the scene of the crime, Burke said the citizen-led contingent's findings weren't enough for the city to take an official stand on the issue.

"The committee is not the court — that's the difference right there," she stated. "...I'm not getting into the court's business."

Taylor said he thinks the Council's inaction could damage relations between the police department and the community.

"I think we have a real problem with people being able to trust the police force," he said. "...We have to restore our faith in our police force and faith in the people, and taking no stance does not do that."

While the issue is no longer before the Council, Montgomery and Taylor have both vowed to keep fighting on Smith's behalf as private citizens.

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