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Greene denies assault

By John Minter
 THE CHARLOTTE POST

The "Thrilla in Manila" it wasn't.

Charlotte City Council member Malachi Greene denied striking businessman Troy



Greene

Watson Tuesday after Watson called him a liar. Greene apologized to his constituents for the now-infamous confrontation at McDonald's Cafeteria,

but said he only grabbed Watson.

Watson filed assault charges against Greene after the incident at the Tuesday Morning Breakfast Club. Watson alleges Greene threw him to the floor and punched him several times. The confrontation occurred as Greene talked about plans to save McDonald's Cafeteria.

"I did not hit Mr. Watson," Greene told reporters at Renaissance Place restaurant. "I did not put Mr. Watson in a head lock or a half nelson."

Greene says he reached across two rows of seats to pull Watson out of his chair, but they were separated.

Watson would not talk about the incident Wednesday. "It will all come out in court," he said. "There's no secret what happened."

Tuesday Morning Breakfast Club, formed in the '70s as an informal gathering of the city's African American community leaders, has had its share of confrontations, but none that have gone this far.

Greene's attorney, Frank Cref, said his client would not be able to discuss the incident in detail because of the pending charges. Greene must appear at an administrative hearing June 4. He is charged with assault and battery, affray and aggressive physical force. He faces up to 30 days in jail and a \$250 fine if convicted.

"The actions that did occur were not intended to inflict injury, threaten or harm Mr.

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PHOTO/CALVIN FERGUSON

Barber-Scotia College senior Gena Watkins sold her house four years ago for a chance to earn a college degree. Now 31, she'll graduate Saturday with a 3.98 grade point average.

Pomp, circumstance

Graduates take the nontraditional route

By Jeri Young
 THE CHARLOTTE POST

Joanne Saulsberry is waiting by the phone. A graduating senior at Winthrop University, Saulsberry, who earned a 4.0 grade point average, is waiting to see if she will be class valedictorian. She is giddy, the elementary education major admits.

"I can't stop thinking about it," she says, pausing only briefly to take a breath. "Oh God, I can not describe it. I'm elated."

Saulsberry, 21, an accomplished musician, has been married for a year, which makes her accomplishments even more startling.

"It was tough," she says. "It took balance. I had to balance the needs of my husband and home with the demands of school."

She is one of thousands of nontraditional graduates that will hear "Pomp and Circumstance" this week.

Students like Saulsberry make up an estimated 28 percent of graduating seniors from public colleges and 22 percent of graduates from private institutions, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

For four years or more, many of them have struggled to get that elusive sheepskin.

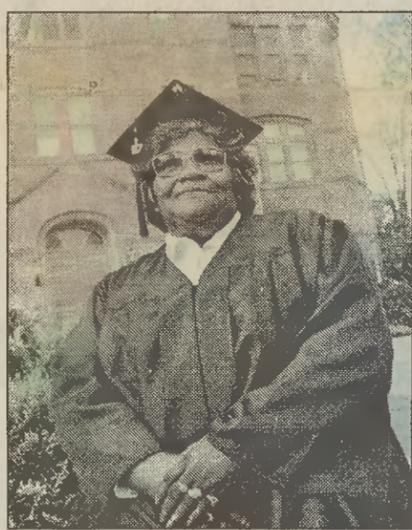
For non-traditional students, the demands of undergraduate education are pressing.

Unlike traditional students, nontraditional students often have dependents or spouses to care for and often pay for school themselves. They are generally older than other students and have a difficult time adjusting on insular college campuses. It's challenging, but for many it's just the beginning.

Barber-Scotia College senior Gena Watkins is also holding her breath. She sold her home and started college at age 27. Always a good student, Watkins spent several years working after high school, but she wanted a college education.

"I can't put it into words," Watkins says. "It's more

See SENIORS on page 2A



PHOTO/CALVIN FERGUSON

Elizabeth Murray will earn a degree at age 64.

Degree is best Mothers' Day gift for 64-year-old graduate

By Herbert L. White
 THE CHARLOTTE POST

Sunday is going to be a big day for Elizabeth Murray.

Sure, it's Mothers' Day, but it's also graduation day for Murray, who's earning a sociology degree from Johnson C. Smith University at age 64.

"All this great excitement," said Murray, who turns 65 June 12. "What a time."

The road to graduation has been difficult at times. After graduating from Central

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Muhammad speaks for local Nation of Islam

By John Minter
 THE CHARLOTTE POST

"Mama, I love you," little Tyrone Withers would say as he hugged his grandmother's neck almost every day. Always he smiled, she recalled.

That earned him the nickname Smiley. Others recall Tyrone as the shy, quiet and bookish student who graduated from East Mecklenburg High School in 1984.

Today, Tyrone Withers is Minister Robert Muhammad, 30, leader of the Nation of Islam's Charlotte mosque and reading rooms throughout the area.

Sickly as a child with asthma, Muhammad stands tall and straight as an adult, speaking forcefully on behalf of the Nation of Islam.

His leadership has brought Charlotte its first fully-recognized mosque since the mid-'70s. The NOI is an accepted part of the community, with regular participation in grassroots anti-crime and neighborhood revitalization efforts. Membership is growing, but equally important is the acceptance and respect among non-Muslims.

"We are showing the city we are here to stay and to help in the way we know to be successful," Muhammad said. "We are accepted as being helpers of the community, particularly, for example, the Cummings Avenue community."

Muhammad says he sees his role as an ambassador for the Nation of Islam, on his job at Central Piedmont Community College and wherever he comes in contact with non-Muslims.

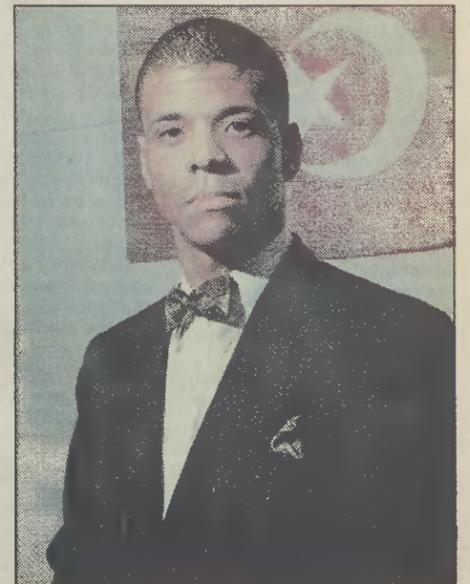
"I watch what Minister (Louis) Farrakhan does nationally and internationally," Muhammad said. "I try to do that locally."

Though employed at CPCC, Muhammad says his service to the Nation is his full-time job. He's a financial aid and veterans affairs specialist at CPCC, but is moving more into the maintenance of computers, a passion born during a brief stint at IBM's Charlotte facility.

"I consider this my primary job," Muhammad said of his ministry. "If I left CPCC, I would survive. You don't compromise what you believe in and what you stand for."

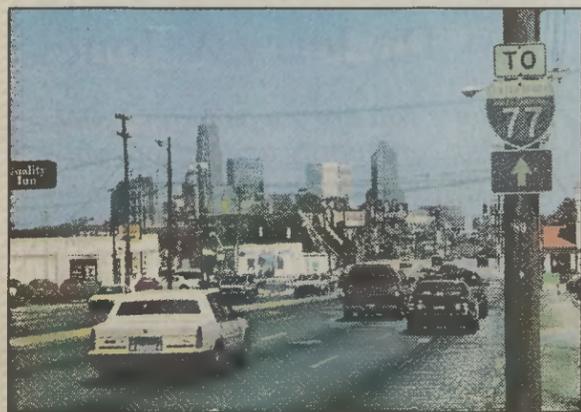
Muhammad's grandmother, Jesse Withers, raised him from age 6 months, marveling at his intelligence and love for his fellow man. He would spend summer

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PHOTO/CALVIN FERGUSON

Robert Muhammad has been a high-profile leader of the Nation of Islam in Charlotte.



PHOTO/CALVIN FERGUSON

Wilkinson Boulevard would get a \$25 million economic boost if a Charlotte Chamber idea is accepted by Charlotte's city council. Under the plan, a public-private venture would bring a business park to the west Charlotte area.

Wilkinson targeted for boost

By John Minter
 THE CHARLOTTE POST

One of the city's main west-side corridors would get a \$25 million economic boost if a Charlotte Chamber idea is successful.

The Chamber has asked the city to participate in a plan that could bring a 60-acre business park to Wilkinson Boulevard, a major corridor between uptown and the airport.

The park could also be important to the revitalization of the City Within A City area, the oldest developed part of the city generally defined as within 4 miles of uptown. Initial projec-

tions predict the park would have up to 10 businesses and employ as many as 600 people. The city's contribution would be \$200,000 for infrastructure and pre-development spending, such as site analysis, land surveys and planning.

The Chamber and private partners would match city funds and add an investment package of up to \$6 million for land acquisition.

The idea of a Wilkinson Boulevard project was mentioned during discussions about an uptown arena and entertainment complex. The idea was championed by TransAmerica

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Eddie Hanna, owner of Ability Transport, helps the disabled get around. Story on page 8A.



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