

A peaceful, persuasive leader

Based on an inscription in his yearbook, it's safe to say that Mengesha Tekle made a strong impression at McQuaid Jesuit High School.

"I was voted 'Most likely to lead a revolution,'" the 18-year-old said with a laugh. "Maybe that's what will happen."

The soft-spoken Mengesha, who graduated June 11 from McQuaid, doesn't seem the type to turn to guns and bombs. But revolutions can also begin by peacefully turning the tide of public sentiment — and in that respect, Mengesha could well be the man for the job.

Mengesha showed his persuasive skills this past spring when he organized fundraisers for the people of Mozambique, a small southeast African country that has been ravaged by floods. Mengesha sought donations among his classmates, but found many unwilling to help the cause. Though the lack of interest upset him, it did not deter him.

"If you believe in something, you go forward," he said. "Even when you get a negative response."

Mengesha said he patiently explained to his peers that Mozambique's economy had collapsed and many people were left homeless by the floods — yet the tiny country was receiving little support from other nations around the world. Within a short time, Mengesha noted, students were either donating their loose change or bringing in money from home.

"It just makes you understand the power of knowledge. Once you give them the information and they see it's legit, they're more willing to help," Mengesha remarked.

Mengesha was this year's president of the McNair-King Society at McQuaid, a group of mostly African-American students who serve as support outlets for each other. The idea to help Mozambique, he said, arose when Tony Trama, a McQuaid global studies teacher, asked him if the club planned to do anything for the flood victims.

Mengesha's efforts also included organizing a Faculty vs. Students basketball game on May 25. All told, he said, the school turned

\$880 over to the American Red Cross.

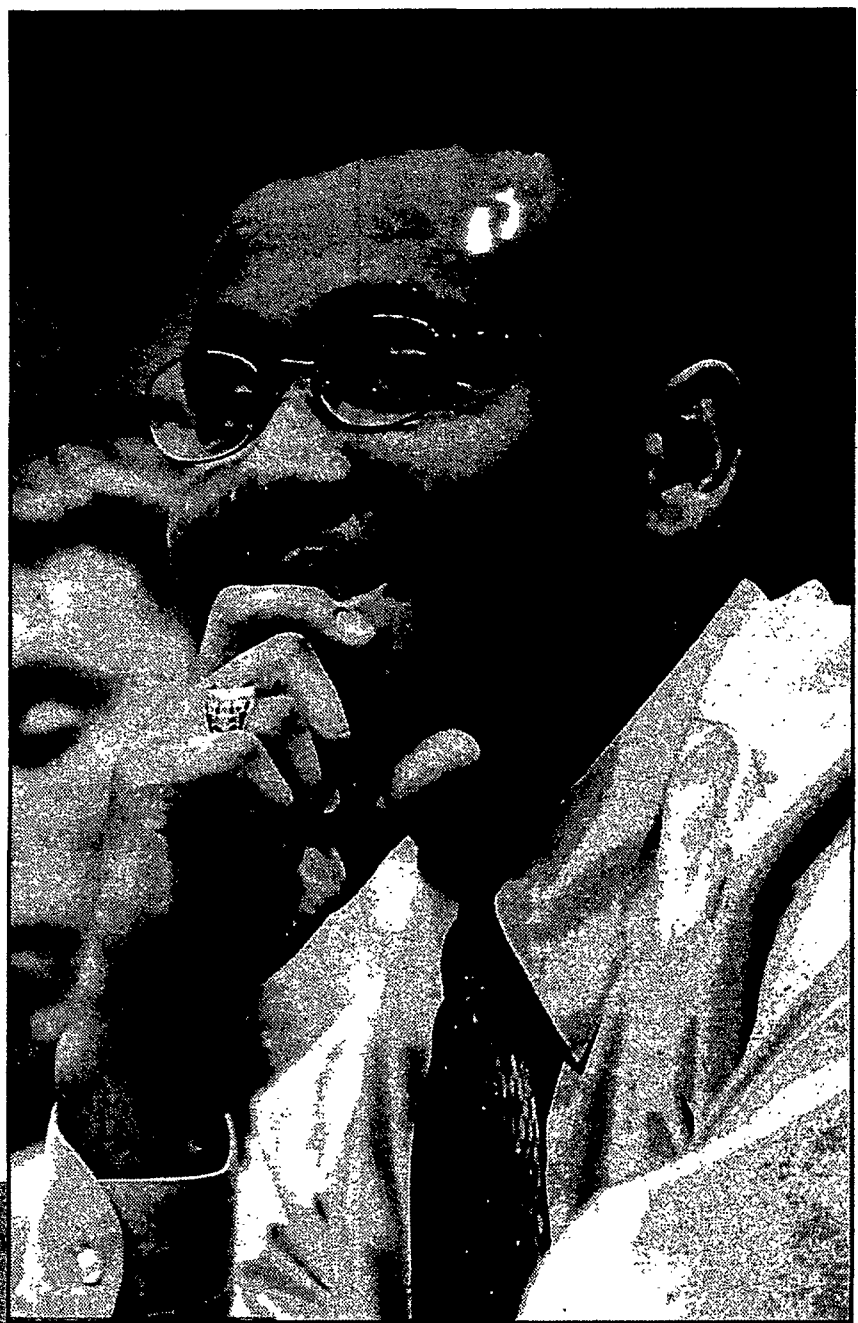
Trama said he was amazed at Mengesha's tenacity in launching the fundraising project, saying, "I've never encountered a student like him. I never had to lift a finger once I made the suggestion. He just took the ball and ran with it, which is the way he is. He just went for it and didn't stop."

Perhaps some of Mengesha's passion for Mozambique is tied to his awareness of strife in other parts of Africa as well. Mengesha's parents are natives of Eritrea, formerly part of Ethiopia in northeast Africa. Eritrea seceded from Ethiopia in 1993, becoming an independent nation.

Mengesha, a Catholic, was born in Sudan because his family was driven out of its homeland by war. They moved to Rochester in 1985, when he was 3 years old. His family's move was sponsored by St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Rochester.

Mengesha's parents are now divorced, and he lives with his mother and sister. His father was an Eritrean soldier, and two uncles and an aunt currently serve in the Eritrean military. Mengesha observed that if he had currently been living in Eritrea, he would likely have been training for the military as well.

Mengesha said he has only limited knowledge of his family's life during the warring. "A lot of things my mom never really talked about," he said. "She kind of likes to concentrate on where we're going, not on the past."



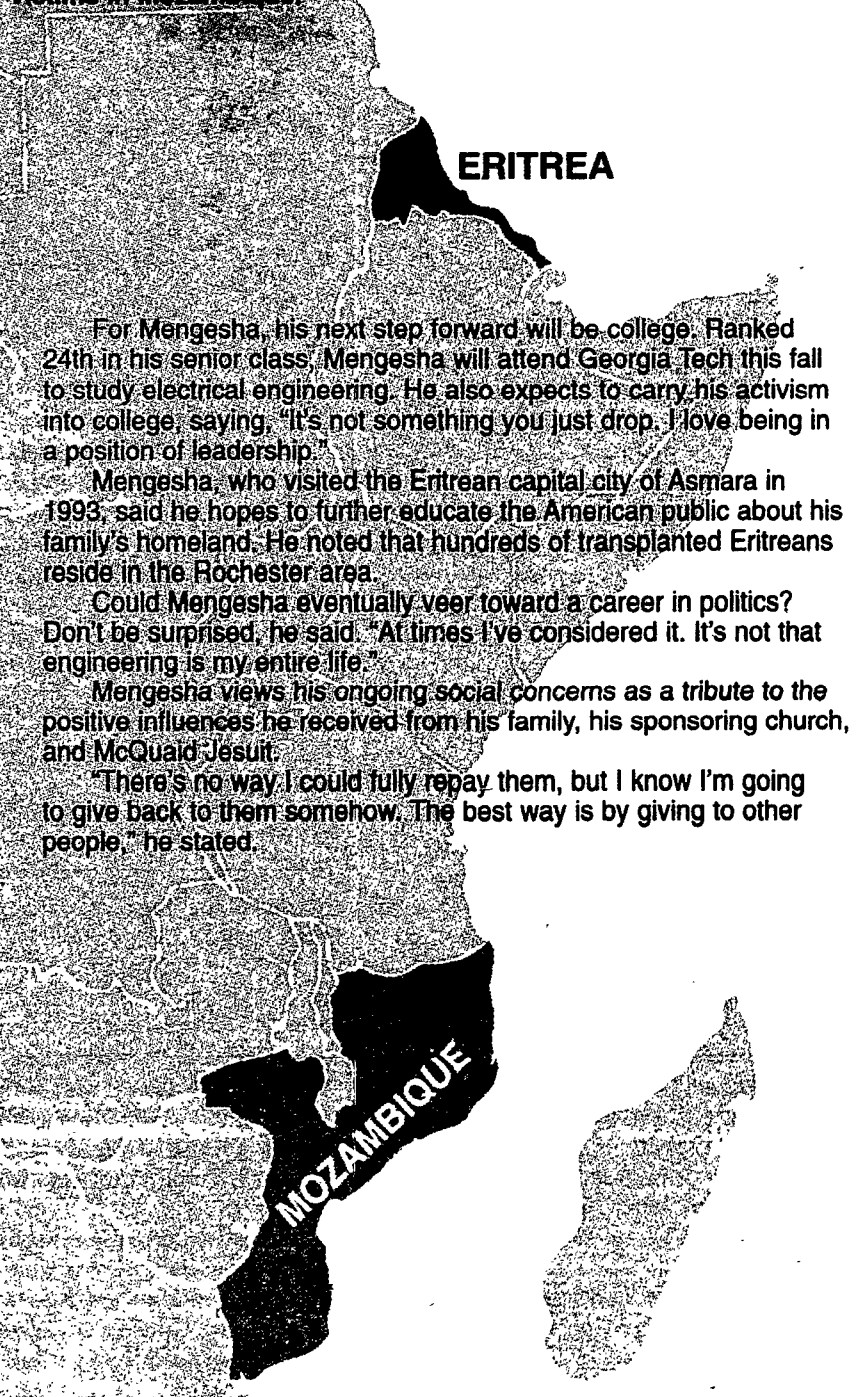
Mengesha Tekle watches the players at the Faculty vs. Students basketball game May 25 at McQuaid High School. Mengesha, who was born in Africa, organized the game to raise money for flood-stricken victims in Mozambique.



Mengesha explains the lineup to Quinton Grant during the basketball game.

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For Mengesha, his next step forward will be college. Ranked 24th in his senior class, Mengesha will attend Georgia Tech this fall to study electrical engineering. He also expects to carry his activism into college, saying, "It's not something you just drop. I love being in a position of leadership."

Mengesha, who visited the Eritrean capital city of Asmara in 1993, said he hopes to further educate the American public about his family's homeland. He noted that hundreds of transplanted Eritreans reside in the Rochester area.

Could Mengesha eventually veer toward a career in politics? Don't be surprised, he said. "At times I've considered it. It's not that engineering is my entire life."

Mengesha views his ongoing social concerns as a tribute to the positive influences he received from his family, his sponsoring church, and McQuaid Jesuit.

"There's no way I could fully repay them, but I know I'm going to give back to them somehow. The best way is by giving to other people," he stated.

COMING NEXT WEEK:
Vocations retreat