

South Africa creates problems for student

If an international tug-of-war over an African student at the Cascade Center of Portland Community College has a happy ending, Michael Lekoetje will be the first and only African optician in a tiny country of 1.5 million people - Lesotho - a mountainous independent Black nation which is landlocked on every side by the Republic of South Africa.

But before Lekoetje can return to Lesotho next year to make eyeglasses for his countrymen, he must overcome economic, political and possible racial pressures which have developed around him while he has studied in Portland this year.

When Lekoetje arrived in Portland last September for two years of optical technology study his future looked rosey: a missionary doctor who brought him to the Northwest was funding his education, a third of a million dollars of optical equipment donated by American Optical Company awaited his return to the Maluti Adventist Hospital where he could make eyeglasses and relieve the country of depending on neighboring South Africa for eyewear, and a trust fund was developing to pay for Lekoetje's second year of education.

A surprise visit to Portland this week from Dr. Rick Lukens, administrator of the Maluti Adventist Hospital where Lekoetje was a hospital aide, brought news that a Republic of South Africa based optical firm is pressuring the hospital to turn over the donated optical equipment to them and not to await Lekoetje's second year of education.

"The South Africa firm has made the pitch of why wait for him to be trained for a year when we can take it now, provide for our own people and sell glasses cheaper," Dr. Maurice Merrick, director of the PCC optical technology program, who met with Lukens explained.

"It sounds good unless you know that the people of Lesotho like to be independent and they don't like to do business with South Africa," Merrick said. "The firm who is putting on the pressure has sent the message that Michael should just come home and forget the whole thing. But that is not what is going to happen if we can stop it." Lukens was impressed with Michael's training here and by the time he left he promised he would call home and ask the board to take action. Michael is capable of setting up his own lab and working independently of South Africa.

Merrick said he is so strongly committed to Lekoetje's training that even if the optical equipment in Maluti is handed over to the South

Africans, Merrick and others are willing to head up a campaign to acquire donated equipment for Lekoetje to work independently of the South African company.

But \$2,400 is also needed for Lekoetje to finish his second and final year of education at PCC. A trust fund established by Dr. Donald Carroll, a Morton, Washington optometrist, has been depleted. Carroll was Lesotho's only optometrist for one year, trained Lekoetje and brought him to the Northwest.

Dr. Robert C. Sander, minister of the University Park Seventh Day Adventist Church, 4007 N. Alaska St., Portland 97203, along with Merrick, are personally trying to raise funds for Lekoetje to finish his education at PCC. Donations should be made to the University Park Church with a note attached that they are earmarked for "Michael's education."

"One way or the other we are going to see him through," Sander said.

Lekoetje, who is homesick for his wife, baby and toddler son in Africa, said that Lukens visit only made him more determined to stay in the United States until he can finish his education.

"First I will have to teach people to set up the machinery and work with me when I return. I must go home totally qualified. I cannot do otherwise, but stay. If there would be any means to bring my wife and my children I would appreciate it, but that does not seem possible. I just have to sacrifice and stay to learn everything I can before I go back. There will be no chance for more education once I return."

Lekoetje was pleased to see Lukens, in spite of the news of pressures at home, because Lukens brought pictures of Lekoetje's family and warm personal greetings.

"The pressures may, to a certain extent, have to do with racial matters," Lekoetje explained. "It may be for a Black man to have studied in this field is a matter of concern to the South African optical company. But I also understand that the eye doctor was a main source of revenue for the hospital and Dr. Carroll's return to Washington was a great loss of revenue. I think the troubles are a combination of business matters and politics."

All of this is new to Lekoetje, 30, who two years ago was a laborer and supervisor in a South African gold mine and never dreamed of traveling halfway across the world.

"I had only a peasant background," Lekoetje said.



If Portland Community College optical technology student Michael Lekoetje can raise the funds to finish his final year of study at PCC plus overcome economic pressures directed towards him from a South African business, Lekoetje will be able to return to his South African homeland of Lesotho as the only optician in the country of 1.5 million people.

But two years ago Lekoetje returned to his home city of Maluti, Lesotho to work as an aide in the hospital where his wife was a nurse. There Carroll became so strongly convinced that Lesotho must have a local African as an optician that he began the trust fund to sponsor and educate Lekoetje, since no one in the country would be left to make eyeglasses and fill prescriptions once Carroll left last summer.

Carroll said in a telephone interview earlier this year that he admires Lekoetje's rise from "humble backgrounds just like everyone else in Lesotho had."

Carroll said he picked Lekoetje to train as an assistant in dispensing glasses because of his excellent English, high school education and previous experience as a supervisor in the gold mines. He has arranged last year for Lekoetje to be educated in optical work in South Africa.

"But the South Africans are discriminatory," Carroll said. "Almost all of the men in Lesotho go into South Africa to work. Lekoetje had come back to be near his wife and children. We sent him into South Africa optical lab for about two months of training. The whites wouldn't cooperate and train him."

By then Lekoetje was determined to become an optician.

"I wanted to learn a profession and I wanted to help people in Lesotho who need medical help," Lekoetje said.

Carroll paid for the airfare to bring Lekoetje to the Northwest with him and began a trust fund for Lekoetje's first year of education last fall.

Both Lekoetje and Carroll have said they are willing to speak to groups throughout the Northwest about Africa and Lesotho.

Liberation day planned

By N. Fungai Kumbula

As has been the custom since 1972, the Black community will be observing African Liberation Day this Saturday at Irvington Park. The activities will start with a march from the Black Educational Center at 17th and Alberta and proceed south on 17th to Going. The procession will then turn west on Going to 7th and then south again to the park. The procession will begin at 12:00 noon and the parade should reach the park by 1:00 p.m.

Again, true to custom, the Black community is going to be responsible for the whole thing: planning, organizing, financing, publicizing and carrying out the whole program. African Liberation Day has become almost sacred to the community and so it is the one event that is carried out each year with Black input all the way from the first little detail to the last hurrah.

There will be speeches, poetry readings, music, dancing, booths selling books, food, articles of clothing and other such items, martial arts demonstrations and storytelling. So much has happened since the last African Liberation Day: Zimbabwe's independence, Liberia, Uganda and, of course, the Black United Front and its continuing battle with the school board. Other

such issues as the perennial problem of unemployment in the Black community, quality education, dope, crime, police community relations and looking ahead in the 80's will all need urgent addressing.

African Liberation Day is the only day in the year when the community sits down to take stock, evaluate progress or lack of same and plan the year ahead. The liberation of Zimbabwe has freed not only the people of Zimbabwe alone but also those in Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Lesotho, Botswana, Angola and given hope to the Africans in South Africa and Namibia. It has further consolidated the independence of the rest of the African continent and given all the other Africans and African descendants around the world renewed dignity, a sense of pride, a sense of accomplishment. Best of all, it gives all of us the much needed inspiration to carry on with our respective struggles.

It's been said before and it will continue to be said: "None of us is free until all of us are free." As long as there is redlining in North Portland, poverty in Mississippi, police brutality in Florida, slavery in South Africa, repression in Namibia and discrimination in England, we have to keep on fighting. It will be a long, hard, bitter struggle but the price is well worth the sacrifices.

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The Research Center at OMSI will be offering courses in computer programming digital electronics throughout the summer. To register, call 248-5907. A course in Basic for Beginners (Levels I and II) will be offered on Sundays from 1 to 5 p.m. at OMSI. The fee per class is \$10. A Digital Electronics Lab for high school students and adults will be held at OMSI on Wednesdays, June 18 through July 23, from 1 to 4 p.m. The lab will be limited to 12 students. Fees are \$30 for the general public and \$25 for OMSI members. A course in Assembly Language Programming for high school students and adults will be offered at OMSI on Saturdays, June 21 through August 2, from 1 to 4 p.m. The class will be limited to 12 students. Fees are \$30 for the general public and \$25 for OMSI members.

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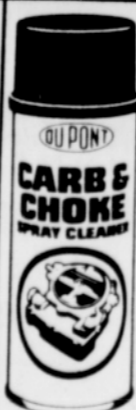
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