

Local

L-6 THE RECORD

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'Magic' touch supports aid for Ethiopia

Hoops star boosts Tenaflly club

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TENAFLY — Sporting his trademark grin and a black tracksuit, Earvin "Magic" Johnson came to town Sunday to support a Tenaflly Middle School program that helps students in Ethiopia.

As he arrived, Johnson sparked a commotion among students and parents, who thrust basketballs, sneakers, photos and shirts at him, hoping for a signature.

Desperate cries of "Magic! Magic!" filled the air as youngsters tried to gain his attention.

Johnson spent 30 minutes watching a teachers-vs.-students basketball game, part of a fundraiser for the school's Global Care Unlimited club, which is building a school in Ethiopia.

Before the game, Johnson spoke privately to about 30 club members about their efforts, and then praised them at the Tenaflly's High School gymnasium, where the game took place.

"This is really important," he told the more than 600 people who attended the game.

By the numbers

\$80,000

Amount raised by Global Care Unlimited's student clubs at Tenaflly Middle School and Demarest Middle School since 2007 for the construction of 12 classrooms that now educate 225 children in pre-kindergarten through eighth grade in Awassa, Ethiopia.

\$50,000

Amount the clubs are now trying to raise for more classrooms to accommodate Grades 9 and 10.

"If we can stand up and give these students a standing ovation," he said. "This is really what it's all about — giving those who are less fortunate than ourselves an education."

Afterward, Johnson attended a sold-out benefit dinner, which cost between \$60 and \$500 a ticket, and attracted 200 diners.

Mark Hyman, a teacher at the

middle school who founded the club, said he expected the dinner and game — which included raffles for a ball signed by NBA All-Stars along with other NBA paraphernalia — to raise between \$30,000 and \$40,000.

For some of those present, however, Johnson's proximity was the real prize, along with some coaching advice he offered the team.

"It was pretty awesome," said Joe Germinder, 14, one of the students picked to play in the game. "My heart skipped a beat when he walked in."

The funds raised will go pay for a new wing at a school in Awassa, Ethiopia. The project, at cost of \$50,000, will accommodate 150 high school students. The club previously raised money to build the

school for 225 students in pre-kindergarten to eighth grade.

About 10 percent of the funds raised Sunday will also go to help earthquake victims in Haiti. The club, which also has a branch in Demarest Middle School, has in the past raised funds to clear minefields and help Cambodian landmine survivors.

Kenneth Acquah, 11, a sixth-

grader at Tenaflly Middle School and club member, said the basketball star's participation had sparked great enthusiasm in the club.

"I'm from Ghana so I decided that I wanted to help countries like that develop," he said. "I'm very excited because I'm a basketball fan. And we are going to raise a lot of money."



KEVIN R. WEXLER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Earvin "Magic" Johnson keeping an eye on the game he was coaching while trying to sign autographs at Tenaflly High School.