A SoulE for Charity

A Homecoming Celebration: NP@45

Citibank Singapore’s CEO Lends a Hand
The launch of the CET Academy gives adult learners more opportunities to upgrade themselves

When Tan Hooi Soon decided to upgrade his skills by pursuing a Diploma in Technology at Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) back in 2005, he soon saw his fortunes change.

Less than two years into his course, his employer, the Public Utilities Board, gave him a promotion and a pay raise. Mr Tan’s story was related by Acting Minister for Manpower Gan Kim Yong in his speech at the launch of NP’s CET Academy on October 21.

Formerly known as the Centre for Professional Development, the new CET Academy, which stands for Continuing Education and Training Academy, will continue to champion lifelong learning by offering courses and one-stop career services such as career counselling for adults who wish to continue learning.

To kickstart this effort, two Memorandums of Understanding were signed between NP and the NP Academic Staff Union, and between NP and the Singapore Manual & Mercantile Workers’ Union.

One of the key thrusts of the CET Academy is to offer more courses under the Workforce Development Agency’s Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) framework.

At present, the CET Academy has 7,000 available training places, with more WSQ courses in early childhood education, retail, infocomm technology, aerospace and the creative industries to be offered in the next few years.

The CET Academy is also reaching out to the ageing workforce. For a start, 42 NP lecturers are currently being trained to become CET trainers, so that they can continue to contribute to education even after the retirement age of 62.

In his speech, Mr Gan stressed that even though Singapore's workforce is highly regarded by international standards, workers must continue to strive.

"With economic restructuring, faster skills obsolescence and shorter job tenures, lifelong learning is key for workers to acquire new skills and maintain their employability," he said.

NP has been offering CET programmes since 1985, and about 5,000 workers graduate from these programmes each year.

The Diploma in Technology programme, which started in 2003, is particularly successful, with the number of applicants in each intake exceeding the number of available places.

Director of the CET Academy, Yola Lim, said: “By virtue of the fact that our Diploma in Technology has been really successful over the past five years, and the kind of recognition we get from the excess of applications every year, it shows we are well-placed to provide quality education for working adults.”

By Jeanine Tan
A group of students had the experience of a lifetime when they were in Beijing for internships and study trips during the Olympics

Watching a milestone in Chinese history unfold before their eyes – and chatting with celebrity athletes – was all in a day’s work for Ngee Ann Polytechnic students who were in Beijing during the Olympics in August.

Forty students from the School of Film & Media Studies (FMS) travelled there to produce a coffee-table book, a Chinese Opera online portal and several documentaries for school projects.

Eight students from the School of Business & Accountancy (BA) were also in Beijing serving their overseas internships.

Students like Brian Lim, a final-year Mass Communication student at FMS, had the chance to witness the astounding transformation of Beijing first-hand.

“Before I stepped into Beijing, I already heard a lot about its transformation, but I never expected it to be such a major metamorphosis,” he said. “Today, you’ll only find suburban villages in preserved cultural sites. Beijing is also now an equal mix of Eastern and Western culture and influences, making the city even more beautiful.”

Meanwhile, Pearl Tan, a final-year Tourism & Resort Management student at BA, who served her internship at Hotel InterContinental Beijing Beichen as a management trainee, was lucky enough to speak with American sprinter Michael Johnson, a four-time Olympic gold medallist – never mind that he was only calling for a beef burger.

“I spoke to this really friendly guy who called for room service but didn’t realise it was Michael Johnson until I hung up the phone and saw the room number on the display panel!” she said, adding that personalities such as filmmaker Zhang Yimou, swimming sensation Michael Phelps and the USA basketball team also visited the hotel.

But it wasn’t just soaking in the Olympic experience that these students found so unforgettable.

For final-year Business Studies student Diane Lim, who also worked as a management trainee at the same hotel, she learnt an important lesson at the athletics event of the Paralympics, which followed the Olympics.

“I was blown away by the determination of the Paralympics athletes. Despite their physical disability, they were tenacious and not at all disabled in their perseverance and determination,” she said.

“They were better competitors than many able-bodied individuals and that really made me respect them.”

By Jessy Chua
A study stint at Wheelock College in Boston gave the pioneer batch of Early Childhood Educational Studies & Leadership undergraduates brand new perspectives

Learning from the Americans was an eye-opening experience for the pioneer batch of students of the Early Childhood Educational Studies & Leadership degree programme.

As part of the degree, jointly offered by Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) and Boston’s Wheelock College, these 59 students spent five-weeks from June to July this year learning at the Wheelock College campus.

Student Michelle Joesoosay Thomas, who participated in the programme, said that Singapore had much to learn from the school’s model for pre-school education.

“This trip was a real eye-opener. What really struck me was how flexible the teachers and education system was in Boston,” she said. “They are less ‘worksheet-based’ and more ‘hands-on’ in their teaching methods.”

The 21-year-old added that the teachers usually used a tender tone when communicating with the children.

“When a child spills water for example, the teachers will say ‘Oh, don’t worry about the spilled water, honey, it’s only an accident,’” she explained.

She also observed that America’s education system may make it easier for some children to transit from pre-school to elementary school, because their education structure and programmes are designed to be seamlessly integrated.

In contrast, the segregation between kindergarten, primary and secondary school levels is distinct in Singapore.

Michelle has no regrets participating in the immersion programme, and feels that it was money well-spent.

“Aside from the practical and academic learning, living away from my family in a foreign country has also transformed me to be a more independent and responsible person,” she said.

The Early Child Educational Studies & Leadership degree programme is offered under the Ministry of Education’s Polytechnic-Foreign Specialised Institution initiative.

Graduates of NP’s Early Childhood Education diploma programme can pursue this degree at a subsidised rate of $7,100 per year. They also receive advanced standing, enabling them to complete the degree in two years instead of four.

For Michelle, one key lesson that she took from her experience at Wheelock College was the importance of allowing kids to experiment and explore.

“Children come to school to learn, and it’s at this stage where they learn to be creative. In Boston, teachers let the kids get dirty during playtime because it’s in the process of ‘getting their hands dirty’ that a child learns.”

By Jessy Chua
Singapore’s First Naval Architecture Degree

The first intake of the two-year degree programme is oversubscribed

Singapore’s first Naval Architecture degree, offered in a tie-up between Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP), Singapore Polytechnic (SP) and Newcastle University in the UK, proved to be so popular that the number of applicants for its first intake was double the number of available places.

The Bachelor of Engineering in Naval Architecture with Honours, which was launched on September 22, has also received advanced applications up to its third intake.

Deputy principal of NP, Foo See Meng, looks forward to the degree tie-up producing more specialists to maintain Singapore’s position as a leading global marine and offshore centre.

“This is a great opportunity for our students who would like to further their studies with a reputable university, at an affordable rate. The response so far has been very encouraging, and we are pleased at the enthusiastic reception to this new degree programme,” he said.

The two-year programme is offered under the MOE’s Polytechnic-Foreign Specialised Institution initiative, which aims to encourage greater specialisation in niche industries.

The degree is offered to graduates of NP’s Diploma in Marine & Offshore Technology and SP’s Diploma in Marine Engineering. These graduates receive a one-year exemption, allowing them to complete the degree in two years instead of three.

Subsidies from MOE translate into financial savings for students. Singaporean students can apply for an MOE tuition grant of $19,400 per year and pay a subsidised tuition fee of only $7,100 per year. Scholarships offered by marine and offshore industry players are also available.

Students will undergo a month-long immersion programme at the university’s campus in Newcastle, UK, with options to specialise in either Marine Engineering or Offshore Engineering.

New $1.1m Endowment Fund for Needy Students

Needy students at Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) will receive a boost from the new Renee Chew Bee Neo Student Aid Grant beginning next year.

In 2008, the Estate of the late Renee Chew Bee Neo donated $1.1 million to NP to establish an endowment fund that will aid students from low-income families. These students will each receive $500 from the grant.

NP has matched the donation dollar for dollar, doubling the endowment fund to $2.2 million. A portion of the interest generated from this amount will go towards funding the Renee Chew Scholarship, which will be awarded to top-performing NP students from 2009.

“We will be able to help more students who may otherwise have to take on part-time employment. The financial boost will take a huge load off their minds and allow them to focus on their studies,” he said.

Renee Chew is a descendent of Chew Boon Lay, one of Singapore’s early manufacturing pioneers. A housing board estate, several roads in Jurong and an MRT station have been named after him.

The late Renee Chew, who trained as a lawyer, is the granddaughter of Chew Boon Lay. She leaves behind a legacy of the gift of education for needy students in his memory, and in the memory of her father, Chew Hock Leong.
Winning an all expenses paid six-month scholarship to a Chinese university of his choice was like a dream come true for second-year Chinese Studies student Wong Wai Foong.

Wai Foong scored this rare opportunity when he emerged third in the grand finals of the 7th Chinese-Bridge International Chinese Proficiency Competition for College Students in July. He was also the only Singaporean who made it to the finals despite strong competition from 110 students from 55 countries.

Held in Changsha, China, the finals comprised of a speech delivery, a quiz and a talent show where Wai Foong played the “zhong ruan” – a Chinese string instrument he picked up as a young boy.

The competition was broadcasted on Hunan Satellite Television and CCTV, two of the most influential TV stations in China.

The Guangdong-born tycoon started his business small – by selling eggs alongside his father when he moved to Kuala Lumpur as a 15-year-old teenager.

But by 1939, Mr Teo had set up his own trading company See Hoy Chan. He took his business to Singapore in 1945, and today, See Hoy Chan is Singapore’s biggest rice importer.

Mr Teo was also a savvy industrialist. In response to the government’s call for entrepreneurs to set up pioneer industries, he established a sugar refinery in 1967.

With his vast wealth, he committed to philanthropic causes, as he felt duty-bound to help others.

The legacy of Mr Teo lives on in NP’s first building at Block 73, the Teo Hang Sam building. It was named after his father when Mr Teo donated $300,000 to NP in 1966.
‘Buy one give one free’ is the inspiration behind a project initiated by a trio of community-minded students

When Justine Lee first heard his pastor tell of how people from poverty-stricken countries could not afford shoes and had to suffer life-threatening infections caused by cuts and bruises on their feet, it stirred in him a desire to help.

He kicked off this desire by applying to Ngee Ann Polytechnic’s (NP) new Diploma in Business and Social Enterprise course, which began in April this year.

Later, in June, he set up Project Selfless Shoe with second-year Business Studies student John Tay and first-year Mass Communication student Lim Jing Ying.

With Project Selfless Shoe, the trio – who dub themselves Sole Makers – will donate a pair of shoes to the needy for every pair that is sold under their SoulE brand.

SoulE is a combination of the words Soul and Sole, which perfectly exemplifies their vision – to provide a sole for every soul.

“Everyone gets excited when they see a signboard that screams ‘Buy one get one free’. How about ‘Buy one give one free’?” said Justine.

In August this year, Sole Makers emerged second place out of 40 teams in the Mayor’s Imagine Social Enterprise Challenge (MISE), an initiative jointly organised by Central Singapore Community Development Council, National University of Singapore Students in Free Enterprise and Social Innovation Park. The challenge provides a platform for youths to start sustainable social enterprises. For their sound business plans, the Sole Makers were granted $25,000 in funding for their project.

For the feisty and passion-driven trio, this is but the beginning of a long-term plan, especially since NP’s School of Humanities lecturer Joyce Tang has stepped in as an advisor.

“Unlike the other participating groups, we didn’t have any mentors at first. It was our own initiative and we did not have the know-how,” said Justine.
A HOME COMING Celebration

A series of celebrations marked Ngee Ann Polytechnic’s 45th anniversary, with Tree Planting Day graced by alumni being one highlight.

For several Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) alumni, it was back to school on October 31. On that special Friday, they returned to their alma mater not to attend lectures – as they had done years before – but to participate in Tree Planting Day, a key event of NP’s 45th anniversary celebrations.

Aside from going green, the NP family also raised funds for the Student Aid Fund. At the time of printing, NP staff had donated more than $128,000. Earlier, students had already raised $51,000 and the Ngee Ann Alumni Association donated $10,000. NP will match the total amount raised dollar for dollar.

Alumni like the Chan family, who all studied engineering at NP; the Neo family, whose two generations were educated here; sea adventurer Elaine Chua and actor Alaric Tay, gathered at the sports complex to watch performances put up by the various schools to commemorate NP’s growth through the years.

The day’s celebrations culminated in a symbolic tree planting ceremony. A total of 45 trees had been planted on campus, and these alumni were invited to officiate the ceremony.

NP News catches up with them to see how life has turned out since their graduation.

Elaine Chua

“People might think that what I learnt at Business Studies isn’t relevant to what I do now, but it’s actually turned out to be very useful. As I have to raise funds to sail, I have to do presentations and think of how to sell the product, with the product being myself. And when you sail, it’s exactly like working in a company – your fellow competitors are the rival companies, the sea and wind forms a natural economic environment, and raising funds is like seeking sponsorship!”

Elaine Chua, 31, Business Studies, Class of 1997, sea adventurer and now Project Manager of the One 15 Singapore Ocean Race

Going above and beyond poly life is part of the Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) experience – after all, NP promises each and every student the chance to experience an overseas learning trip at least once.

So it is only appropriate that in conjunction with NP’s 45th anniversary celebrations, this unique commitment is commemorated in a limited-edition coffee table book appropriately titled “above and beyond”.

Under the supervision of Robin Yee, deputy director and online journalism lecturer at the School of Film and Media Studies, five students from the Mass Communication division wrote the content and laid out the book, which features photographs and anecdotes contributed by NP students, alumni and staff.

Mr Yee said, “What I find really distinctive about NP is its commitment to give every student a chance at a subsidised trip abroad. I thought it was a shame if the experiences of the students were not captured and documented. The 45th anniversary made it the perfect opportunity to propose such a book to show people how far NP has come.”

Last year, about 2,965 students got a taste of learning abroad. Among them was Lee Xian Jie, production editor of “above and beyond”, who has been to Hangzhou and
Xian Jie’s overseas exposure has left an indelible mark on the aspiring journalist. Speaking about his trip to Cambodia, he said, “I was in Cambodia to report on the lack of basic water and sanitation facilities in its rural parts. We had access to speak with villagers and government agencies. The experience not only completely altered my world view, it also made me want to use what I have to help. It’s a lesson you’ll never learn in any classroom or holiday trip to Cambodia.”

By Jessy Chua

The Chan family

“The best thing that happened to me was meeting my wife at Ngee Ann and after that, producing a family of engineers!”

Chan Kheng Lin, 60, Mechanical Engineering, Class of 1973, now retired and married with four children

“NP’s education is very practice-oriented. It has given me the relevant industry skill-sets, such that when I entered the workforce, I hit the ground running. The experiential hands-on and active learning that the school taught me can be applied to life and work. I’ve had the best time of my life here and met a lot of great people.”

Chan Wai Ping, 31, eldest son, Mechanical Engineering, Class of 1998, now a Project Manager with Sembcorp Marine

“My best memory of NP was the adventure trip that my class took to Thailand in my final year. We always had fun in school. But apart from all that fun, I was able to apply a lot of things I’ve learnt in school to my work as a quality engineer.”

Chan Khai Ying, 25, youngest daughter, Quality Management & Engineering, Class of 2004, now a Quality Engineer with Pepperl+Fuchs

Alaric Tay

“I almost didn’t make it to Film, Sound & Video because my grades didn’t make the cut for it. But after appealing, I got in, and so I’ve really treasured my time at Ngee Ann. The intensive meetings, many sleepless nights and the stress of having to do multiple projects definitely made it an unforgettable and worthwhile experience for me.”

Alaric Tay, Film, Sound and Video, Class of 2000, Fly Entertainment Artiste

Cambodia for a media study and reporting trip respectively. Xian Jie’s overseas exposure has left an indelible mark on the aspiring journalist.

Speaking about his trip to Cambodia, he said, “I was in Cambodia to report on the lack of basic water and sanitation facilities in its rural parts. We had access to speak with villagers and government agencies.

“The experience not only completely altered my world view, it also made me want to use what I have to help. It’s a lesson you’ll never learn in any classroom or holiday trip to Cambodia.”

By Jessy Chua
Once a struggling swimmer, Engineering student Ng Zhaomu is now the only poly-level triathlete to qualify for a gruelling American Ironman race

Deciding to learn how to swim at the age of 17 was what led Ng Zhaomu to find his calling as a triathlete.

In his freshman year at Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP), the final-year Mechanical Engineering student tried to join the swim team, but was turned away because he could not swim.

Undeterred, Zhaomu joined the NP Triathlon team and tried to learn how to swim in the Sports & Wellness class.

Still unable to swim after six months, he continued to train on the side with his Triathlon team mates and finally picked up the skill, becoming a full-fledged triathlete.

This doggedness helped him achieve an impressive timing of 2 hours 10 minutes at the 2008 Aviva Ironman 70.3 Singapore Triathlon on September 7.

He finished fifth in the age 19 to 25 category of the gruelling competition, which consisted of a 1.9 km swim route, 90.1 km bike route and 21.1 km run.

He also became the first polytechnic student to qualify for the Foster Grant Ironman World Championship 70.3 to be held in Clearwater, Florida next year.

“To me, the competitive triathlon is a very motivating sport because unlike other triathletes, I am not strong in all three segments,” said Zhaomu, who has more than 30 races under his belt.

“In fact, I was one of the last to get out from the water at the Aviva 70.3, but I caught up with the rest because of my strengths in running and cycling.”

Barely two months after his feat at the Aviva Ironman Triathlon in Singapore, Zhaomu packed his bags for Perak to compete in the Powerman Malaysia 2008 in November, a duathlon race featuring a 11 km run, 64 km bike route and another 10 km run.

While his calendar is packed with races around the region, Zhaomu still manages to balance his studies with his passion – never mind that as race day approaches, his tough training schedule demands that he wakes up as early as 4 am to cycle 90 km before school starts.

“Sacrifices will have to be made but I try to prioritise and manage my time between trainings and school. Well, if it helps, I have never been made to retake a module!” he said with a laugh.

For Zhaomu, there are many other thrills of competing in a triathlon aside from pushing his body to its limits. For example, when he ran in the Aviva Bintan Triathlon, the joy of the experience came from being surrounded by the beauty of the natural environment.

“I thoroughly enjoyed that triathlon. The waters in Bintan were so clear and I could see fishes swimming with me!” he said.

While winning a medal is certainly a boon, Zhaomu says he competes in triathlons for the sheer enjoyment of it.

“Sometimes, the personal satisfaction I derive from completing a race matters more because I know I’ve done another special thing in my life.”

By Jessy Chua
Congratulations to Chairman of Ngee Ann Polytechnic Council Mr Tan Hup Foi, who was awarded The Public Service Star at the National Day Awards. Senior Director of the School of Engineering Dr Lim Choo Min was awarded The Public Administration Medal (Silver), while NP Directors Mrs Choo-Yeo Cheh Hoon of the School of Humanities and Mr Mah Wee Beng of the School of Engineering were awarded the Public Administration Medal (Bronze).

Five NP School of Engineering alumni graduated from Nanyang Technological University with first-class honours this year. They are Tan Kuan Tak, Liao Weisheng, Li Weili, Gan An Zhi and Lu Qimin.

Electronic & Computer Engineering students Kong Jia Qing Richard and Koh Khai Huat won a Bronze in the Mobile Robotics skill area.

Recent Electronic & Computer Engineering graduate Koh Boon Kai Lloyd was awarded a Pepperl + Fuchs Scholarship in collaboration with the University of Manheim in Germany.

The Parkinson’s Patient Mobility Aids, a student project from the Mechanical Engineering division, won the Gold Award at the International Convention on Rehabilitation Engineering & Assistive Technology (i-CREATe) Student Design Challenge in Bangkok, Thailand.

Thanks to a $120,000 grant from the Economic Development Board (EDB), a 12kW solar photovoltaic system was established at the Solar Technology Centre under the Clean Energy Research & Testbedding programme. The Electrical Engineering division and the EDB will collaborate to study the performance of this system and conduct educational and research-related tours.

Kevin Chan says he wasn’t outstanding at school, but the Film, Sound & Video alumnus scores an MDA Scholarship at 30

Kevin Chan, a graduate from the Film, Sound & Video course at Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP), almost had a chance to work on the 2003 film Cold Mountain starring Jude Law and Nicole Kidman.

After his final year at San Francisco University, he was offered an apprentice position with the assistant editor of the epic Hollywood romance, but passed on the opportunity because he had to return to Singapore to complete his six months of National Service deferment. But the 30-year-old’s talent has not gone unnoticed. He recently won an overseas media education scholarship with the Media Development Authority (MDA) to pursue a Masters in Film and Television at the Victorian College of Arts in Australia.

“I didn’t do particularly well while I was at Ngee Ann,” said Kevin, who graduated in 1997. “But it was here that I found my passion for filmmaking and laid a strong foundation to perform in university.”

Despite his humble admission that he was “just an average Joe” at NP, Kevin graduated with first-class honours and won three scholarships and nine awards during university and later, as a promotions producer with MediaCorp.

Kevin has also filmed top-notch Hong Kong director Tsui Hark for a documentary trailer for Channel NewsAsia, as well as a slew of local celebrities such as Christopher Lee, Fann Wong and Joanne Peh.

Attributing his success to NP, he said: “Without my foundation in NP, I don’t think I would have been able to achieve so much in San Francisco. I want to return to NP someday to teach because the first seeds of my career were planted here.”

Another Film, Sound & Video graduate, Joanne Lee, 19, also received an MDA overseas media education scholarship. She is headed for The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts to pursue a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Film and Television.

By Jessy Chua

SPECIAL MENTIONS

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- Five NP School of Engineering alumni graduated from Nanyang Technological University with first-class honours this year. They are Tan Kuan Tak, Liao Weisheng, Li Weili, Gan An Zhi and Lu Qimin.
- Four School of Engineering students performed exceptionally at the WorldSkills Singapore 2008 competition. Electrical Engineering (EE) student Chew Chek Phang Shawn won a Gold in the Industrial Control skill area and will represent Singapore in the WorldSkills Competition 2009 in Canada. Another EE student Yeo Wei Jian Alvin won a Silver in the Industrial Control skill area and Andrew Poh Wei You, also from EE, was awarded a Diploma in the Industrial Control skill area. Electronic & Computer Engineering students Kong Jia Qing Richard and Koh Khai Huat won a Bronze in the Mobile Robotics skill area.
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Film, Sound & Video graduate Kevin Chan (left) had the opportunity to work with famed Hong Kong director Tsui Hark (right).
With the guidance of the School of Life Sciences & Chemical Technology, secondary school students concoct skin and hair products that work

Most secondary school students probably have little idea what Amalaki, Soapwort and He Shou Wu are.

But for secondary three students Siti Nur Hawa, Tan Sihan and Gabriel Lek of Hai Sing Catholic School, knowledge of such herbs helped them win the top prize at the Science of Beauty Awards organised by Ngee Ann Polytechnic’s School of Life Sciences & Chemical Technology (LSCT).

Prior to the competition, students from 24 participating secondary schools attended a workshop conducted by LSCT, where they learnt the basics of making cosmetic bases. The competition was held at the polytechnic’s Convention Centre on October 24. Adviser to Marine Parade GRC Grassroots Organisations, Dr Fatimah Lateef was guest of honour.

The aim of the event was to introduce secondary students to research and life sciences. By allowing them to have hands-on experience in concocting their own products, the students not only acquired practical knowledge, but also gained an understanding of how rewarding a career in research can be.

LSCT lecturer Sally Soh, who coordinated the event, said, “We wanted the students to take away the message that research is not boring. They had a lot of fun creating beauty products and they were very enthusiastic in learning about the process.”

The students were encouraged to look beyond the conventional when sourcing for ingredients to use, and among the many interesting projects showcased were durian sunblock, soya bean after-sun spray and broccoli lip balm.

Aside from the research aspect, the students were also encouraged to consider how they could market the finished product.

“There is a business element to science,” added Ms Soh. “We wanted to introduce the students to entrepreneurship skills by showing them the importance of being able to market their products.”

For Gabriel, he learnt plenty from creating a product from scratch and designing the packaging.

“It was pretty unusual to see how wax could turn extracts into cream,” he said. “It was also fun brainstorming up ways to create labels to make our products look professional.”

By Jeanine Tan
Jonathan Larsen took time off from his CEO duties to play mentor to students’ social enterprise project

When second-year Business Studies student Jacinta Kwee approached Citibank-YMCA Youth for Causes to solicit funding for her group’s social enterprise project, Project AuctionLove, she never thought Citibank Singapore’s top gun would end up becoming her mentor.

All student enterprise groups under the Citibank-YMCA Youth for Causes programme are mentored by staff from Citibank Singapore or YMCA, who guide them through their social enterprise projects.

Jonathan Larsen, CEO and Country Head for Citibank Singapore, became the mentor of Jacinta’s four-member team in August.

Jacinta’s team, along with 357 volunteers from Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) and various secondary schools, sold plush toy ducks and raised an impressive $13,000 in just one month for Make-A-Wish Foundation Singapore, a charity organisation that grants wishes to children who are battling life-threatening illnesses.

The proceeds from the sale of these toy ducks are used to help fulfill the wishes of sick children, giving them renewed energy to battle their illnesses.

According to Jacinta, “duck” means “darling” in British slang – so the duck was an appropriate mascot for Project AuctionLove because the team wanted to convey the message that “every child is a darling and precious to our hearts”.

Mr Larsen, who came down to NP on October 25 to formally close the project and participate in an appreciation tea, said that he was impressed when he heard the pitch for Project AuctionLove.

“It’s my first time personally mentoring the student groups and also the first that I’ve been so directly involved. The team, in fact, didn’t need much mentoring,” he said.

“Most of their ideas were already in place and all it needed was a little bit of tweaking and an experienced person to help them add on to what was already there.”

But Jacinta had a different story to tell. She said that it was only through Mr Larsen’s guidance that they could obtain the resources that allowed them to achieve such a high profit.

Mr Larsen also took time out of his busy schedule to give the team three personalised consultations at his office.

Speaking warmly of her mentor, Jacinta said, “With his help, we were able to secure about five venues for outdoor booth set-ups to sell our plush duck toys. The locations definitely helped in boosting our fund-raising figures.”

In addition, it was with his encouragement that they managed to sell all the remaining ducks to Citibank staff. About 300 staff supported the cause and $3,000 was raised from the sales at Citibank’s office alone.

Added Jacinta, “Jonathan is a very sincere and helpful person. We were very happy and privileged to have him as our personal mentor.”

By Jessy Chua
A Diplomatic Discussion

Ambassador-at-Large in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ong Keng Yong engages top students in a lively current affairs talk

Maintaining close bilateral relations with Singapore’s neighbours is far from the kind of topic that second-year student Koh Wei Jie studies in his InfoComm Technology diploma course.

That’s why the Current Affairs Weekend Retreat he took part in on October 25 proved particularly fascinating.

Wei Jie was among the 50 students from Ngee Ann Polytechnic’s Talent Development Programme (TDP) who turned up on a Saturday morning at OurSpace@72 to hear Ong Keng Yong, the Director of the Institute of Policy Studies and an Ambassador-at-Large in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, speak in a special closed-door session.

Mr Ong, who has been a diplomat for 10 years and has been to the USA, Saudi Arabia, India and Nepal on diplomatic postings, engaged the students on the topic of “Defending Singapore’s National Interest”.

The discussion centered on Singapore’s management of bilateral relations with the USA as well as her neighbouring countries, and the economic development principles that Singapore abides by.

Organised by Student Development and Alumni Relations (SDAR), the event aimed to encourage TDP students, who are top-performers of the polytechnic, to form independent opinions on global issues.

Student Development Manager John Chng said, “SDAR frequently organises programmes, workshops and seminars for TDP students to nurture their critical thinking, leadership and communication abilities.”

For Wei Jie, the weekend retreat did just that.

“It’s given me an increased awareness of current affairs and exposed me to topics that I wasn’t familiar with previously,” he said. “I believe that my increased understanding of the world around me will put me on the same level as my junior college counterparts when I apply for a scholarship.”

By Jessy Chua

The RED STATE of Photography

Four litres of milk and one box of strawberries – that was the amount of food that Yeo Fu Bi, a second-year Chinese Studies student used for her winning photo at the “Red” photography exhibition.

The artistic photo, painstakingly taken over a period of two days, captures a falling strawberry splashing into a pool of milk. It took roughly one thousand continuous shots to achieve the perfect shot.

The five-day exhibition, organised by students from Ngee Ann Polytechnic’s Chinese Studies Diploma Programme, showcased photos with a red theme, and was held across four days beginning August 4 at OurSpace@72. Veteran photojournalist

Bob Lee from the daily freesheet My Paper mentored the students.

Pointing out that many of the students started out with only a very basic grasp on photography, Mr Lee called their works “an achievement”.

“It was not easy for the students to achieve a sophisticated look and feel for the photos since they were using consumer compact cameras which do not have the sophisticated functions and features of a DSLR camera,” he said.

By Jessy Chua
A Space to PLAY

As teens, they had nowhere to go to play board games, so a group of Ngee Ann alumni set up their own chain of board games cafes

When they were engineering students at Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) in 1990, good friends Colin Lim, David Lum, Jason Ho and Justin Teo used to get ticked off by their parents for spending long hours playing their favourite board game BattleTech.

But years later, in 2003, this shared passion for board games served as the impetus for the foursome to pump in their own money into setting up the first Settlers Café outlet at North Canal Road.

The cafe’s concept of playing board games as you enjoy a bite proved to be so popular that there are now four outlets in Singapore.

David, who used to be an insurance agent, and Colin, Jason and Justin, who were regulars in the air force, navy and army respectively, now run the cafes full-time.

David recalled that in those days, NP didn’t have as many hangout spots for students. As a result, the friends had to play at fast food outlets like McDonald’s at Beauty World.

“We had to look for places outside of school because we were making too much noise,” he said.

Added Colin, “Students are more fortunate now, as there are air-conditioned lounges for them to unwind and play games.” Indeed, these days, students can enjoy a round of games at the popular hangouts OurSpace@72 and the Lifestyle Library.

Even after the friends graduated from NP in 1991 and 1992, they continued with their board games hobby. It was playing at Colin’s house and feeling bad about “messing up his place” that spawned the idea of a board games café.

As David explained, “Why not set up a place where people can gather for board games and food, without having to deal with the hassle of clearing up?”

Coincidentally, two weeks after they first conceived the idea, friends who had come back from a vacation in South Korea shared with them that there were many such cafes there, reinforcing their business plan.

The rest, as they say, is history. While board games cafes are no longer a novel idea in Singapore, the friends explained that the strength behind Settlers Café is that it was set up by people who have a real love for these games. As such, they pay attention to small details like bringing in designer board games that are not easily available in Singapore.

Colin explained they also want to spread the joy of board games to youngsters.

“We hope to be able to spread the message that board games aren’t just games but can help to teach you valuable lessons, like how to save your money and formulate strategy.”

By Joyce Peh