Ngee Ann makes Clementi Woods Park bloom again

SEA Games medallists reveal a secret of their success

Will Young Indian Entrepreneur of the Year Rakesh Gupta please rise?

Volunteer group VoLUME is all pumped up
The classroom might have moved from the School of Business & Accountancy to downtown Bugis, but the Tourism & Management (TRM) students were still expected to give the unconventional lesson their due attention. On 7 January, second-year TRM students participated in a spot of onsite learning when they attended ‘class’ at the InterContinental hotel at Bugis. This is the first of a series of classes to be held outside the classroom in this semester and the next.

The programme included a hospitality Business Management case study on hotel performance indicators as well as a dialogue with Ms Evelyn Tay, the hotel’s Director of Sales in Travel, on hotel performance in 2007 and the outlook for 2008.

Lunch also became a time to learn more about enhancing business and dining etiquette.

“The reason for this arrangement is to ‘plug’ the students to the web of happenings in the arts, conventions and meetings, and tourist sites,” says Dr Michael Chiam, a lecturer at the School. “Bugis, where the hotel is located, is an excellent location where students can immerse themselves.”

Business as usual
To help young Singaporeans stay in touch with their roots, Ngee Ann Polytechnic’s School of Humanities recently organised a writing competition that gives budding authors in Singapore a chance to wax lyrical about home, sweet home.

Revolving around the theme Home is Where the Heart is, the competition invited participants to write about their lives, focusing on a person, place, or event in Singapore that has meant something to them.

Imaginative ones could even submit the manuscript in the form of a diary entry or letter – but it has to be for children aged four to eight.

“This is the first time that our School of Humanities is organising such a competition as a creative way of presenting Singapore’s heritage or lifestyle,” said Mrs Choo Cheh Hoon, the Director of the School of Humanities. “The competition aims to create in young Singaporeans a sense of belonging in our country, and seeks to harness the potential of young writers of children literature.”

An annual event, the competition promotes bilingualism by encouraging youths to write creatively in English and Mandarin.

“It is very exciting because these budding writers will also be required to submit their own illustrations to go with their original stories,” said Mrs Choo. “If the entries are good, we will even consider publishing them.”

Organisers are targeting to attract about 200 entries.

Writing home to keep in touch

Mad about IT

IT was a manic Friday last 14 December when teams from different secondary schools, junior colleges, and polytechnics gathered to pit their IT skills at the annual Algo*Mania competition hosted by NUS.

But sanity prevailed for the three participants from Ngee Ann Polytechnic’s School of InfoComm Technology, who were second-year Diploma in Information Technology students Bui Huy Quang Vu, Chen Kun, and Lau Han Yang.

Beating teams from Singapore Polytechnic, Nanyang Polytechnic, and Temasek Polytechnic, they walked home with the top prize in the Polytechnic category.

Algo*Mania is part of the National Infocomm Competition, a challenge created to uncover infocomm talent in Singapore.

Algo*Mania follows the rules of the ACM International Collegiate Programming Contest, a prestigious meet for university students all over the world. It also has a level of difficulty similar to the National Olympiad in Informatics.

Bui Huy Quang Vu, Chen Kun and Lau Han Yang won top prize at the Algo*Mania competition.
SURELY few things are worth more than good relationships.

After eight years of collaboration, Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) has renewed its ties with the Regional Training and Resource Centre (RTRC) Asia in a new five-year Agreement, with an extensive clause for another five.

In 1999, the Diploma in Early Childhood Education was developed and launched jointly by NP and RTRC Asia. Since then, the two have worked closely to enhance the learning experience for NP students. This includes turning old classrooms into purpose-built training rooms, and building a new child study and development centre. Called Caterpillar’s Cove, the centre is operated by NTUC Childcare.

NP and RTRC staff also co-teach at the Wheelock College degree programme in Early Childhood Education Studies & Leadership offered on the NP campus.

“As partners on multiple fronts – the diploma course, the degree tie-up, and the child study and development centre, NP and RTRC Asia are working hand-in-hand to raise the quality and professionalism of Singapore’s childcare and pre-school industry,” said Mr Chia Mia Chiang, Principal of NP, in his opening remarks at the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signing ceremony last year.

Another MOU that creates new opportunities for NP students is the one between NP and the Singapore Human Resources Institute (SHRI) that is aimed at enhancing Human Resources Management knowledge and skills.

According to Mr Philip Lau, Second Director of the School of Business & Accountancy, the highlight of the MOU is the formation of the NP-ShRI Student Chapter at NP.

“Students will take on key appointment positions in the NP-ShRI Student Chapter to conduct HR-related activities that will expose (them) to current HR trends and practices, and engage them in meaningful network and dialogue so as to better prepare them for their (future) workplaces,” he said.

NP graduates who take the Human Resources Management option of the Diploma in Business Studies will also be conferred the Human Resource Associate or HRA status upon approval by the SHRI Accreditation Board.

During the 25th Singapore River Regatta, the team not only emerged champions in the Inter-Varsity Polytechnic category, they also came in first for the National Championship (Men) race.

“My heartiest congratulations to the NPDB,” said Mr Chia Mia Chiang, Principal of Ngee Ann Polytechnic. “It was a very remarkable achievement by the team. NPDB can be very proud of the team spirit and the 100-per cent commitment of its individual members.”

THE Ngee Ann Dragon Boat Club (NPDB) won their last major gold in the Temasek Regatta two years ago, and it looks like 2007 was their year to make some waves again.
Ngee Ann Polytechnic’s (NP) New Revolving Age (NRA) Hip Hop Club is feeling more than a little merry.

On 20 January, five teams from the club made it to the finals of Funkamania 13, a dance competition for tertiary institutions. They are Static Flow, FBeatx, E’Dee Vance, Wicked Tempo, and Soul Out Crew.

Only 10 teams made it to the finals – five from NP, two from the National University of Singapore (NUS), two from NUS/Nanyang Technological University, and one from Nanyang Polytechnic.

And NP’s groovy moves caught the eyes of the judges. Not only did we win the prize for Best Choreography (E’Dee Vance), Best Male Dancer (Terence Chen from Soul Out Crew), and Best Female Dancer (Allegra Gong from FBeatx), E’Dee Dance and Soul Out Crew also came in second and third overall respectively.

NP’s NRA Hip Hop Club has a lot to be proud of.

Last December, Rough Addicts, a hip hop dance troupe made up of NRA alumni and current members took part in the 4th Annual Battlegrounds International Championship in Melbourne, Australia.

Battlegrounds is an international hip hop dance competition, with teams from Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and the Philippines.

Out of 34 participating teams, Rough Addicts was the only team from Singapore. In order to qualify, the seven girls had to win the local Suntec Dance 2007 competition in September last year.

In addition to coming in fourth overall, Rough Addicts also won a special award for Best Costume. But, hey, who wouldn’t dance attendance to threads like baggy khaki pants, engine-red jackets, white shirts and ties, black vests, and jaunty newsboy caps?
Amazing race

O H, how sweet the sound of your running shoes hitting the rough terrain of a gruelling desert – especially when you are as bent on adventure as Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) adjunct lecturer Toh Poh Joo.

Having crossed the Gobi desert in 1999, the Engineering Mechanics lecturer is now eyeing the Atacama Desert Race in Northern Chile that starts on 30 March.

“The Atacama Desert Race is one of the toughest races in the world,” he said. “Participants have to cover a total of 250km in six consecutive days, which roughly works out to running a full marathon each day.”

Participants also have to carry their own backpack containing sleeping gear, clothes, a first aid kit, and enough food and water to last six days.

“One of my objectives is to raise funds for The Straits Times School Pocket Money Fund,” said the 33-year-old, who used to run a tuition centre for working class families in a HDB estate.

The 1995 Ngee Ann Kongsi Gold Medallist and Lee Kuan Yew Gold Medallist also wants to encourage his students at NP to step out of their comfort zones to gain invaluable life experiences.

He added: “This stems from my personal conviction in character-building through adversity and hardship, which has constantly led me to challenge myself and push my physical and mental limits.”

Special mentions

- Filmmaker and Diploma in Film, Sound & Video graduate Anthony Chen has another feather in his cap. In the wake of winning an award at Cannes with his short film Ah Ma, his latest flick, Haze, has been selected for the Short Film Competition of the 58th Berlin International Film Festival. This is the first Singaporean film selected for the main short film competition of the highly-acclaimed festival.

- Ngee Ann Polytechnic has been awarded the Public Service Award based on the school’s achievement of key organisational excellence standards in 2007.

- For his contribution to education, School of InfoComm Technology lecturer Brendon Lam has been awarded the JCCI Education Award 2007 by the Japanese Chamber of Commerce & Industry.

- It’s twin bliss for NP alumnus Chua Qijing, who received the Outbound Immersion Award under the Temasek Foundation – NTU LEaRN Programme for his participation in the Global Immersion Programme, and the International Business Fellowship Award by International Enterprise.

- Offered scholarships under the Lee Kuan Yew Scholarship to Encourage Upgrading (LKY-STEP) to pursue degree programmes at NTU are Mechatronic engineering graduate Winston Chow Wei Jie and Electrical Engineering graduate Koh Chuan Seng.

- Marine & Offshore Technology graduate from the Class of 2002, Eyana Hamid graduated from the University of Newcastle with a First Class Bachelor of Engineering (Marine Technology with Honours in Offshore Engineering).

- School of Film & Media Studies alumni bagged one Gold, five Silvers, and three Bronzes in the Film category of the Crowbar Awards 2007.
Active voice

There is nothing passive about OurVoiceBox.sg. A Chinese entertainment and lifestyle portal created by a group of Chinese Studies (Media) final-year students, it not only covers youth-centric news, but also allows the team who designed it to proactively work with broadcasters and radio stations to organise events in Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP).

The team has helped to coordinate Channel U’s Campus Yummy Hunt, a TV infotainment show to introduce the tastiest food in NP. During the recent NP Open House 08 Concert, the team also helped to put together the S-Pop Hurray! segment.

Other noteworthy projects include the collaboration with MediaCorp Y.E.S. 93.3FM, which led to a programme slot for NP students to dedicate songs ‘live’ on air in the Atrium. And when local singer Tanya Chua was promoting her latest album last October, OurVoiceBox.sg worked with SPH Radio 100.3FM to organise a Tanya Chua Music Sampling session on campus.

Little wonder that, within three months of its soft launch last September, the portal registered more than a million hits.

Going places

It is never too early to start the F1 craze.

When the School of Engineering’s Mechanical Engineering Division decided to organise a Go-Kart Competition around campus, it admitted it wanted to add mileage – to the Diploma in Mechanical Engineering.

As part of their final-year projects, the NP students had to design and build five karts to complete an obstacle course. The karts were powered by 5.5 hp engines, and prizes were given for Best Circuit Time and Best Design or Decoration.
Make it happen

A little gesture here, a bit of kindness there. It’s heartwarming to realise how much of a difference Ngee Ann Polytechnic can make when we set our minds on it. Through collaborations with different partners, or on our own, we do great things, from bringing cheer to the disadvantaged to improving the environment and raising awareness of community issues.

Teach & learn

IT started with a community service project to Qingdao, but it has given birth to a photo exhibition that speaks a thousand words.

Displayed at the Asian Civilisation Museum from 15 January to 14 February, Life in Qingdao is a collection of prints by students from the School of Film & Media Studies.

The photographs were taken when they paid an eight-day visit to Liu Gou Creative Primary School in China’s Qingdao last year to teach the 400 children there.

In a bid to document China’s educational milestones, the two dozen students also made a short documentary of the Chinese education system as seen through the eyes of a 10-year-old village girl, Sun Xin.
WHEN Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) adopted Clementi Woods Park last year, we were in for keeps. It was not an impulsive whim (think cute puppies who end up abandoned). It was not a publicity gimmick (think Hollywood celebrities in a Third World orphanage). Rather, it was about making lasting changes for the better.

For instance, to help NParks, who manages the 12-hectare Clementi Woods Park, deal with flooding and soil erosion, two third-year Civil & Environmental Engineering students from NP conducted a site analysis, and identified drains prone to choking by dead leaves and debris.

As a result, NParks has been able to improve drainage in certain areas to prevent flooding.

Elsewhere, a team of Electrical Engineering staff and students constructed a motorised landscape trolley for elderly park workers. Powered by both solar energy and car batteries, the environmentally-friendly device is NP’s response to a call for help by NParks, who wanted to lighten the load of its elderly employees.

After all, this is what you do when you adopt someone – you get involved.

For about 40 second-year Horticulture & Landscape Management (HLM) students, this meant spending two months to make a circular garden in the park bloom again, planting different flowering plants, and returning weekly to give some tender, loving care.

“This is part of NParks’ continuous efforts to cultivate among students community passion and ownership for greenery,” said Mr Ng Lang, the Chief Executive Officer of NParks. “We are happy to partner NP to integrate Clementi Woods Park into the syllabus. The new learning park concept serves to engage the students in a real park setting.”

For example, to enhance the learning experience, NP students armed with PDAs explored Clementi Woods Park using Global Positioning System-activated content at five hot spots in the park. Their journey of discovery included receiving pop-up information on plants, and practical tips on horticulture maintenance.

And for the first half of 2008, NP will train its first-year and second-year HLM students to use the Mediascape software to add content from other modules such as Arboriculture, and Taxonomy & Plant Identification. “The park is an extended learning platform for our students to conduct fieldwork and experiments in many fields such as horticulture, landscape design, conservation, market research, and engineering,” said Mr Chia Mia Chiang, the Principal of NP.

With such a good start, future plans to improve Clementi Woods Park as well as give NP students and staff fertile ground to exercise their creativity are simply a walk in the park.
Go back to nature


In 2004, NP made a pact to take Hindhede Nature Park under its wings. Since then, NP’s Building and Environment Green Volunteers have conducted free Native Plant Hunts and Plant Walks to highlight the importance of protecting our nature reserves in an interesting way.

With the new environmental programme, secondary school students can look forward to a You and Your Environment Learning Trail, which underlines the importance of individual responsibility in protecting the environment.

The learning trail set in the forested area of the park also emphasises how, collectively, we can tackle environmental challenges like biodiversity conservation, climate change, and waste recycling.

Thirty-six students from 18 secondary schools also participated in a two-day Nature Eco Camp, jointly organised by NP and the Underwater World Singapore. There, the pupils captured the beauty of the environment in a nature photography competition.

“I would like to commend Ngee Ann Polytechnic and the National Parks Board for putting in time and passion to bring this new environmental programme to fruition,” said Dr Teo Ho Pin, Mayor of North West Community Development Council. “I believe that the programme will be well-received, and will create opportunities for communities to become more involved in environmental protection programmes.”

The art of love

ANYWAY you look at it, it is a love match for Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP), Ngee Ann Primary School, and the Singapore Spastic Association.

A collaboration among the three organisations, The Art of Love Wall Mural is a huge collage of painted tiles by artists suffering from cerebral palsy.

It’s a little shaky, but who says the course of love always has to run smoothly?

According to NP student participant Gerry Ong, the wall mural has the “dual-purpose of promoting community service among younger people and raising the profile of people suffering from cerebral palsy.”

The artwork is also recognised by the Singapore Book of Records as the Largest Collage of Tiles Painted by People Suffering from Cerebral Palsy.
A volunteer group, VolUME (which stands for Volunteerism: U & Me) sure is pumped.

After participating in a community service trip to Thailand in 2006, the team of 10 Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) students continued their selfless spree by working with a local non-profit organisation, Peace Connect.

According to Ms Sharon Quah, a lecturer at the School of Interdisciplinary Studies (IS), the students initiated and organised charity events for Peace Connect without any prompting and intervention by lecturers and the School.

She added: “I thought this is really amazing because most groups (would) stop volunteering after the trip.”

Ms Quah is referring to an overseas service learning trip to Thailand, during which 10 NP students and three young ex-offenders from Kaki Bukit Prison School spent 10 days in Thai village Ban Pha Mon.

There, they spent two days assessing the needs of the community before implementing eight projects to meet those needs. When they returned to Singapore, they were challenged to look deeper into social concerns and inspired to do more for the community.

This is in line with the three stages of service learning, which are Plan, Render, and Reflect. “Service-Learning has been proven to be an effective tool in organising community service projects,” said Ms Quah. “It promotes a need-focused, service-oriented, learning-oriented, and responsible way of organising community service projects.”

Organised by NP in collaboration with Singapore Prison Service, Habitat for Humanity Singapore and Habitat for Humanity Indonesia, the service learning trip to Thailand was aimed at giving the students a deeper understanding of the ex-offenders, and a greater appreciation of their home country, national identity, and sense of belonging.

Prior to the trip, the students and ex-offenders attended six pre-departure preparatory workshops conducted by NP lecturers. The workshops gave a deeper insight into volunteerism and service learning, and taught participants more about the Thai culture and the basic Thai language.

“What touched me most (after the trip) is the friendship developed between the ex-offenders and our students,” said Ms Quah. “The bond was so strong that the group continued to meet for social gatherings after the trip.”

Pump up the VolUME
T’S 35,000 feet above the South China Sea and the plane ferrying Mohammad Farhan Kamsani, Eugene Chua and Dennis Leong is on its way to the 24th SEA Games 2007 in Thailand. Gripped by the vision of sporting glory, they had each made tremendous sacrifices and had duly earned their places aboard Team Singapore.

Mohamad Farhan Kamsani
Hockey (Men’s Team) – Silver Medal

It was a situation that would have sent lesser men crumbling. Less than a week before he was due to participate in the SEA Games, the father of third-year Electronic & Computer Engineering (ECE) student, Mohamad Farhan, passed away.

With his grieving family’s wholehearted support, the 21-year-old made the toughest decision of his life yet – to carry on with his SEA Games journey. The outcome? A bittersweet victory as the Singapore men’s hockey team reached the hockey finals.

At 20, Farhan was the youngest member on the hockey team selected to represent Singapore in the 2007 SEA Games. “It was a whole new kettle of fish, when compared to the usual cup tournaments,” he said. “There was more media attention and when we got there, we were all treated like superstars.”

With the support of his teachers and classmates at Ngee Ann Polytechnic, Farhan juggled full-time school with his training. Although the competing team had full-time players, he and his Singaporean team mates put on a strong showing and came in second.

Singapore might have lost to Malaysia in the finals, but it’s his will to persevere despite the circumstances that Farhan will remember.

Eugene Chua
Fencing (Men’s Team Foil Category) – Bronze Medal

Physical training up to seven times a week? It’s a thought that would be daunting to most young Singaporeans. Yet, this 20-year-old third-year Civil & Environmental Engineering

Of sweat, tears
daily from his workplace at Changi to Clementi Sports Hub to train. Frequently, he wouldn’t reach home, which is in Pasir Ris, until 11pm.

The hard work paid off, however, and Eugene met his personal target by bagging a Bronze at the 2007 SEA Games. Although he was disappointed to finish only two points shy of a spot in the finals, he is quick to point out that the SEA Games experience was one that he enjoyed immensely.

Dennis Leong
Fencing (Men’s Team Epee Category) – Bronze Medal

At 27, Dennis Leong is well-spoken, well-groomed, and the perfect spokesman for what is often seen as a gentlemen’s sport. A Marketing Communications Executive for Fencing Singapore, this Electrical Engineering (EE) graduate has been competing nationally since he was 15. By the time he enrolled in Ngee Ann Polytechnic, he was well-prepared for the demanding task of balancing fencing with his studies.

Aiming for Gold, Dennis trained with the Chinese Olympics team’s coach as well as participated in tournaments and training camps leading up to the SEA Games. Unfortunately, he did not count on meeting the Filipinos in the semi-finals, which threw his “game plan” off. The bronze medallist, however, remains optimistic that the future is worth its weight in gold. “Hopefully, Laos (the hosts of the 2009 SEA Games) will have the facilities to host fencing, and I’ll have my chance then.”
Not many people can say they’ve watched their business rise and fall before they were out of university. Even less would be able to say that they went on to build a bigger success afterwards. CEO Rakesh Gupta tells us how he managed that (and a whole lot more) – all before hitting the age of 30.

The rise & rise of Rakesh Gupta

GRADUATING from Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) with a Diploma in Computer Studies in 1997, Rakesh Gupta has his eyes set on one thing – owning his own software company. Tapping the dotcom boom of the late ’90s, Rakesh and fellow NP graduate, Lim Soon Jinn, founded their first company. Working part-time while completing their undergraduate degrees at the National University of Singapore (NUS), they found some measure of success.

Within three years, however, the dream was over. The dotcom bubble burst and Rakesh found himself at a crossroads. He had to choose between a secure future as an MNC employee, or to carry on pursuing his dream.

He didn’t hesitate to choose the latter. “I wasn’t demoralised at all. In fact, we felt encouraged by the fact that we had come so far and learnt so much, in such a short time,” Rakesh recounted.

With plenty of passion, Rakesh and Soon Jinn approached the Economic Development Board (EDB) with a business plan. Under the Startup Enterprise Development Scheme (SEEDS), the duo got funding to start their company, Heulab.

“To be honest, we had absolutely no business experience,” says Rakesh. “So we were quite surprised when we got funding. And sure enough, a few years later, when we’d become closer to the folks at EDB, they told us that it was our passion which

“Explore your potential and the potential of your business idea by seeking funding yourself. The hands-on experience you get pitching your products to investors is incalculable.”
won them over.”

With the funding from EDB and the $250,000 they’d raised themselves, their company, which specialises in learning software development, was born in 2002. Despite frequent pitfalls, the fledgling company soon developed a reputation for their speed of execution and well-developed products.

The year 2004 proved to be a watershed one for them, with the first of their major successes. They were approached to develop an application that together with tablet PCs, will replace pen-and-paper classroom learning at Crescent Girls’ School.

The project was part of an initiative by the Infocomm Development Authority and Microsoft Singapore. It proved so successful that, within a year, Microsoft had named Heulab its “Best Independent Software Vendor” and recognised it as a certified partner.

Hardly one to sit on his laurels, Rakesh set out to further develop Heulab’s global presence. The company, a Small-to-Medium Enterprise (SME), now counts over 100 educational institutions among its clients in Singapore, in addition to boasting overseas offices in the US and Australia. Heulab also receives tenders for its products from countries ranging from Brunei to Japan.

With major industry players like Microsoft and Fujitsu helping it to market products to new regions, Heulab now enjoys an annual revenue of over $2 million.

The success of Heulab has not gone unnoticed. In 2007, within the short space of a week, they were selected as a launch partner of Microsoft’s Windows Vista Programme as well as mentioned in the Singapore Budget Speech 2007.

The then Second Minister of Finance, Mr Tharman Shanmugartnam, described Heulab as, “part of a new generation of local firms, fleet-footed, unafraid to venture out to the world early, and at the leading edge of technology.”

Rakesh Gupta was also awarded the Singapore Indian Young Entrepreneur Award last year by the Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and DBS Bank. Presented by President S R Nathan, the award took Rakesh by surprise.

“I had looked at the list of nominees before the dinner and all of them, without a doubt, were larger than Heulab. So I had just gone along for a nice dinner and was quite taken aback when I was called up!” Rakesh said with a laugh.

CEO. Young entrepreneur. When asked about being a role model for the Indian community as well as for budding entrepreneurs, Rakesh grimaced. “I hate that label,” he said. “I’m always worried that I might fail and let people down.”

Yet, his never-say-die attitude serves as an inspiration to anyone who has ever dreamed of setting out on his or her own.

Rakesh also encourages young entrepreneurs to go out and seek funding for their ideas – whether it’s from their schools, government agencies and bodies, or private investors. “Explore your potential and the potential of your business idea by seeking funding yourself,” he said. “The hands-on experience you get pitching your products to investors is incalculable.”