

TRIBUNE

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Bridging the digital divide

NP's e-zine, Urbanwire spearheads a drive to provide needy households with a personal computer. Some 100 computers were refurbished in the exercise. AARON WONG reports.

Unlike most Singaporean teenagers her age, 15-year-old Vicky d/o Murthi could not use a personal computer (PC) to surf the Internet and do her research and school-work.

But that changed on 22 February when she received a donated PC.

Vicky, who suffers from Musculoskeletal Development Delay that makes her unable to walk or stand up properly, was one of about 80 students who received the PCs at the Urbanwire Computer Charity Drive at Block 52.

A specialist project team, comprising four third-year Mass Communication (MCM) students, and Urbanwire, an entertainment and lifestyle e-zine run also by third-year MCM

students, collected 276 PCs and got 100 of them in working condition in 10 days, with help from Ngee Ann Polytechnic's (NP) Computer Club.

The specialist team, made up of students Keh Chien Yung, 24, Michelle Chin, 22, and Marcus Loh and Karene Ng, both 19, were supervised by a School of Film & Media Studies lecturer Mr Robin Yee and helped by course mate Samuel Teo, 19. Mr Yee, 35, is also the lecturer-in-charge of Urbanwire.

Students at the drive received the donated computers and peripherals based on recommendations by non-profit organisations or secondary schools. The remaining computers are being distributed after the event to similar recipients.

Vicky is part of the Therapy and Educational Assistance for Children in Mainstream Education (TEACH ME) programme run by the Asian Women's Welfare Association (AWWA). The programme helps her cope with the physical, social and educational challenges of a secondary education.

She was one of five AWWA students at the drive. According to Esther Xu, 23, TEACH ME

Services Volunteer Coordinator, 10 children from AWWA will be receiving donated PCs.

The event was part of Urbanwire's first anniversary celebrations, and it was the first time NP has collected and refurbished used PCs, and distributed them on its own.

Vicky, a Secondary Three student from Bukit View Secondary School, was beaming as she clutched the keyboard closely to her chest. "Now I can complete all my projects on time, and find information on the Internet also," she said with a huge smile on her face.

Her mother, Kamala d/o Kanannam, 50, said the computer would greatly alleviate their family's situation.

"Everyone needs a PC. Actually, we had an old computer, but that one had no printer, no modem, so we couldn't do much. But this one is better quality, so Vicky can finish her projects. It's also helpful to me. I can learn how to use it," she said.

The family's old PC, however, has been spoilt since 1998.

"PCs nowadays are getting more and more expensive. I'm a single parent, and I have to support my [two] children. I really cannot afford to buy her a new one," she added.

Mdm Kamala earns \$800 a month as a production operator which is insufficient to cover Vicky's medical expenses. Vicky has multiple severe medical problems. Mdm Kamala is currently paying from her Medisave account, but this may not last.

Apart from AWWA, recipients also came from Fei Yue Family Service Centre (FSC) and Kampong Kapor FSC, and schools like the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus (Toa Payoh).

The students who came on Saturday were greeted by rows of computers, refurbished by volunteers and the project team. Among the volunteers was third-year Electronic & Computer Engineering student and President of the Computer Club Jason Lin.

Jason, 20, and 18 other Computer Club members helped refurbish the computers after school and put what they learnt in their Co-Curricular Activity to good use.

"As Computer Club members, this is our area of expertise, so we wanted to do something meaningful and to get involved. Our members also get to learn something new and practise what they've learnt. We worked mostly from 5 to 7pm. If they (specialist team) required us to stay longer, we would also have done that," said Jason.

The volunteers had to check and troubleshoot all the PCs, and also cleaned them for their new owners.

One of the volunteers was not even an NP student. Lin Jiaqi, 17, is a first-year student at Hwa Chong Junior College, but found time from his busy schedule to help out. He had donated two PCs, but felt that was not enough.

"I can't be doing much just by donating computers. I thought it would be more meaningful if I helped more," he said.

"We should realise that even in developed countries like Singapore, there are still people who are under-privileged, who do not have the luxury of owning PCs. It'll be good if more educational institutions and companies can contribute to such charitable causes," he added.

The response from donors was good too. However, because of the tight deadline, not all donations could be entertained, despite the efforts of the team and Changi Freight Forwarders, who volunteered to transport the computers to six collection points around Singapore.

Yip Yin Kai, 73, who donated two PCs, was convinced of the need for all students to have computers. "I'm hoping that the younger generation will have every opportunity of a further education," said the avid computer user.

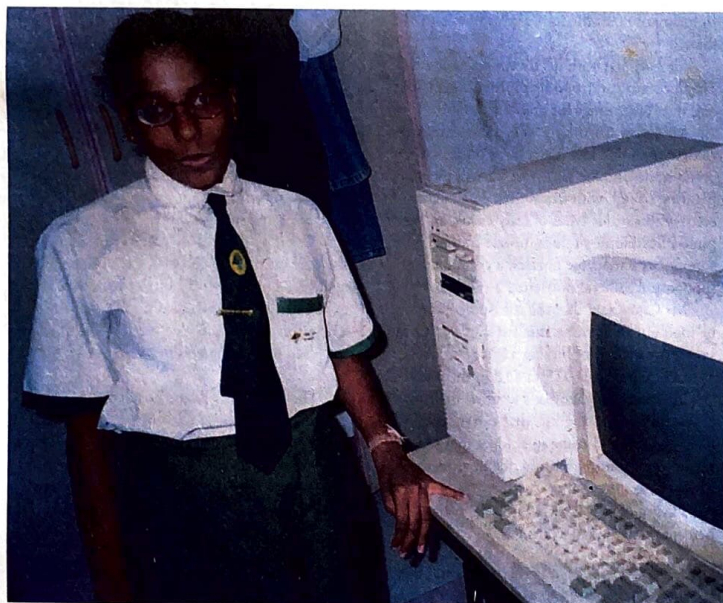
The donors received rebates of up to \$350 for Fujitsu products and stood to win a tablet PC worth \$4,000. Fujitsu PC Asia Pacific committed more than \$400,000 in rebates to the project.

The winner of the tablet PC was Mr Paul Low, 46, a financial services manager. Donating with no expectations, he admitted that it was a "pleasant surprise" to win. "It's quite simple. Somebody needed a PC, so why not give to someone in need? It's a wonderful thing to help the needy and spread the IT experience. I certainly wouldn't mind helping out (in future events)."

Mr Low's help was much appreciated by the four-member specialist team, Samuel and Mr Yee. Karene Ng, 19, the team's Multimedia Director, felt the project was very difficult.

"There are technically only six of us working on this project. Everyone else was only volunteers so we can't expect much and be too dependent on them. The refurbishing work took so much effort and seriously, none of the six of us knew how to go about it. We had to learn about all the parts from scratch," she said.

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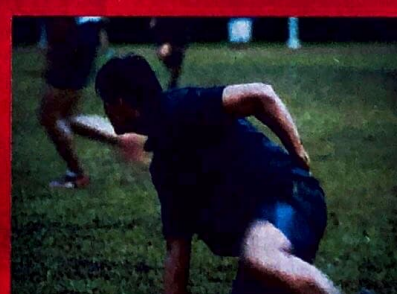
LONG WAIT OVER: After five years with her spoilt computer shown here, Vicky will finally be getting another, albeit a used one, thanks to Urbanwire, NP's e-zine. Urbanwire collected some 276 used computers and refurbished them into 100 serviceable ones. (Picture: Aaron Wong)



2 New low-cost method to make cold-climate vegetables



4 Exploring and evaluating our Open House



8 Poor IVP finish for injury-stricken Rugby Club

Going back to their roots

BY LIN MEITONG
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The School of Interdisciplinary Studies (IS) introduced "Insight Into China" this semester, its first module conducted entirely in Mandarin.

One of IS' 17 Level Two communication modules, it is taught by adjunct lecturers from the Zhejiang University City College (ZUCC) in China.

Professor Huang Xianyi, who teaches print journalism as well as Chinese culture in ZUCC, taught the module before the term break. He has since returned to China and another ZUCC lecturer is teaching the module.

IS limited the module to two classes of 20 students. It introduced "Insight Into China" in Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) because there is "tremendous interest in China as it's opening up in terms of entrepreneurial opportunities", said Mrs Diana Chee, IS' Communications Category Manager.

"IS feels that there is a place for the module and is confident that students will be interested to take it," she said.

"Through this module, students first get an insight into China. Then hopefully, they can take on the challenge of entrepreneurship there," she added.

However, IS may discontinue the module if it is unable to get lecturers from China to teach next semester, said Mrs Chee.

Andy Lim, 18, a second-year Information Technology (IT) student, took the module because "I like Chinese culture. In addition, the teacher touches on China's history which I'm interested in".

The syllabus for "Insight Into China" includes China's history, traditions and ethnic groups; developments in modern China; and the relationship between China and Southeast Asia.

To be eligible for the module, students have to obtain a minimum C6 grade in GCE 'O' Level Chinese.

Jason Lim, 18, second-year IT student, said, "Teaching this class in Mandarin is more appropriate because of the nature of the module. Anyway, I normally speak Mandarin."

Professor Huang felt that Chinese youths today were not really familiar with their traditions and culture.

"Through this course, I hope to educate them about their roots and customs, so that they gain a better understanding of their culture," said Professor Huang in Mandarin.

He also hoped to "open up a window to let students take a peek into China's history, culture, society and economy through this module".

However, he admitted its duration was too

short to teach the whole of China's extensive culture. He said, "I will come back next semester to teach if given the chance, as this is also a good opportunity to learn from each other."

He hoped that students who were interested to know more could search for information on their own.

Eugene Yu, 19, second-year Electronic & Computer Engineering student, agreed. "I hope to learn more about China's history and culture. But in such a short time, I think can only learn some parts of it."

Professor Huang assessed the students' performance through assignments such as journals, essays and presentations. For example, students had to research a particular aspect of Chinese tradition and then record the customs in their journals. They had to include pictures as well as write in Chinese.

Professor Huang said, "Youths here use English more often and I hope to promote the use of Mandarin through this class."

He added, "One of the reasons why NP students use more English could be that the NP library does not have enough Chinese books."

Through this course, I hope to educate them about their roots and customs, so that they gain a better understanding of their culture.

- Professor Huang Xianyi, Adjunct lecturer, "Insight Into China" module

Invention paves way for cheaper vegetables

BY KEH CHIEN YUNG
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A Biotechnology (BIO) lecturer has spent more than a year developing a more economical way to produce cold-climate vegetables, as he was unsatisfied with the costly commercial method of production in Singapore.

Named "air-dynaponics", his system depends on an ordinary aquarium air pump to deliver nutrients directly to the vegetable roots. It is similar to high-pressure pumps used in aeroponics – a soil-less way of growing plants which are held above a system that constantly directs nutrient-filled water to the roots.

"The normal price range of producing one kilogram of vegetable using aeroponics is between \$4.50 to \$5.50. That's very, very, very expensive. With my system, it costs roughly less than 60 cents," said Mr Gregory Chow, basing his comparison solely on energy usage.

Besides cold-climate vegetables like cabbage, cauliflower and lettuce, the two systems can be used to grow other leafy vegetables as well.

In Singapore, vegetables are increasingly imported instead of home-grown. Statistics by the Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority of Singapore show that vegetable imports in 2002 have increased by more than 20,000 tonnes since 2000. Local produce however has decreased from 19,293 tonnes in 2000 to 16,525 tonnes in 2002.

Two BIO students are now comparing the crops and conditions in air-dynaponics and aeroponics set-ups as part of their final-year project.

Ginny Tan, 20, third-year BIO student, said, "The crops grown are similar to the ones that are grown in aeroponics systems. Another advantage is that temperature in the trough is lower, much lower than the one in the aeroponics system. So there will be less chances of the roots turning brown and less chances of

the crops being damaged [in the air-dynaponics system]."

Ginny explained that the aeroponics system has a higher temperature as much energy is converted to heat by the high pressure pumps when in operation.

Her partner, Joanna Tan, 20, saw a different value in the project. "It can act as a hobby. It's quite fun growing your own crops, in seeing them so small, then it becomes so huge. As I see it grow day by day, it gives me a sense of satisfaction," she said.

To ensure that comparisons between the two systems are fair, crops were grown in similar conditions and seeds were taken from the same package, Mr Chow said.

Mr Chow, who has worked on an aeroponics farm, understood that the main production costs of such farms came from high energy usage and decided to do something about it.

"More importantly, for us lecturers in Ngee Ann, we are always informed and always reminded that whatever research we do, we try

to make sure that the industry can benefit," he said.

He said that with his invention, Singaporeans can try to be more self-sufficient and not "take things for granted".

Mr Chow is working with a few companies to develop home kits. Each kit is projected to cost around \$80, he said. The kit will include a planting trough with a cover panel, a packet of seeds with various types of leafy crops, an air pump, flexible air tubing, nozzles, internal support structures for nozzles, a germinating sponge and mineral nutrients, he added.

Mr Chow said that the start-up costs may be high but in the long run, users of the kit can save more instead of buying a kilogram of vegetables that costs \$15 to \$18 in the market.

To attract Singaporeans to grow their own crops, he is proposing kits that can be assembled like Lego sets and come in colours that match the home furniture to bring out the fun aspect of vegetable growing.

He hopes that the kit will be bought by 10 percent of all Singaporeans.

How air-dynaponics works

Mr Chow adopted the Venturi effect – the principle behind how different levels of pressure on the upper and lower parts of a plane can help lift the aircraft or keep high-speed racing cars from flipping over – to create an upward push of water without expending too much energy.

Air pump nozzles are placed just below the water surface to constrict each nozzle opening. This forces the air to rush out of the nozzle at a high speed, causing the spurting. The effect is similar to the result of putting the hand over or squeezing a water hose, Mr Chow explained.

The biggest challenge he faced was positioning the nozzles to ensure the spurting effect. Otherwise, the air pump only produces bubbles when it is submerged too deeply, he explained. To solve this, Mr Chow used very flexible tubes that can be coiled into loops.

The vegetable roots are also suspended in the air for maximum air circulation. He said that if the roots are submerged into the nutrient solution of fertilizer and water, oxygen in the solution would be exhausted by the roots, leaving a foul smell and a higher chance of crop failure.

Basic air-dynaponics set-up

1. Set-up is basically mobile and simple – a four-litre trough, fertilizer to be dissolved in water, an air pump, air tubes and nozzles.
2. Nutrients can last as long as three to four months before they need to be changed.
3. Each crop takes around 11 weeks to fully mature.
4. Seedlings take two weeks to grow in a sponge that has minerals (fertilizer dissolved in water) absorbed in it.



NOT JUST ECONOMICAL: Vegetables produced with the new method have a lower chance of having brown and damaged roots. [Picture: Keh Chien Yung]

Foreign students dominate engineering award for women

BY LIN LIZI
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Seventeen of the 21 top female engineering students who received the Motorola Awards on 7 February were students from China and Malaysia.

The award was given out to top female students from level one and two of four engineering courses: Electronic & Computer Engineering, Electronic & Telecommunication Engineering (ETE), Electrical Engineering (EE) and Mechanical Engineering.

Winners received cash prizes of \$100, \$75 and \$50 for the top three places respectively, medals and certificates.

The academic journey was tough for the foreign students who had to overcome social barriers. Zhou Jing Jing, 19, the top female EE student from China, has been in Singapore for only about six months. The first-year student took about two months to settle in.

"It takes a while for me to get used to life in school, especially when I can't speak good English," Jing Jing said in English. "I was afraid to speak to my classmates because I fear to speak in English."

Jing Jing had taken a half-year English course in Shanghai with two of her friends and classmates, Xu Jie and Meng Fei, who were also among the winners.

Xu Jie was the runner-up for the award in the same level while Meng Fei came in third. The English course was taught by their agent in China to prepare them for study in Singapore.

"The English class does help us communicate better," said Meng Fei, 19, but she still has her fears as the syllabus is taught in English, a language she said she was weak in.

She chose EE out of the many diploma choices in Singapore because the English admission criterion for engineering is relatively



MODEL STUDENT: Kerk Shiao Lien, third-time Motorola Awards winner from Malaysia, was chosen to give the thank you speech at the event, as she shows an exemplary attitude towards her studies. (Picture: Lin Lizi)

lower compared to the rest.

Mr Jeffery Tan, President of Motorola Singapore, said that he was impressed by the winners, as most of them were foreign students who had won the award more than once. "I really take my hat off to them," Mr Tan said.

Kerk Shiao Lien, 21, third-time winner at the Motorola Awards and second-year ETE student, was the student representative chosen to give a five-minute thank you speech. She took two weeks to prepare for the speech in English, a language she was "not fluent in". Shiao Lien had scored a C in her GCE O-level English while scoring AIs for her other subjects.

"I am a Malaysian and I know that my English is not very good. That's why I study extra harder," she said. She tried rehearsing the speech whenever she had time, even between lessons. "I was surprised that they (Academic Affairs) chose me as the student representative because I was not the top student," she said.

Organiser of the Motorola Awards ceremony and Examination Officer in the Academic Affairs Office, Ms Ang Wei Wei, said she chose Shiao Lien because Shiao Lien has "aspirations and real interest in engineering" and can set a good example for others with her "very good attitude towards her work".

Summer school set to stay

BY UMA CHANDRAN
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Ngee Ann Polytechnic's (NP) Summer School pilot initiative was well received by Electronic & Computer Engineering (ECE) students last December.

33 students studied for the Signals and Networks module, every day for three weeks, and scored As for the module.

It was hoped the Summer School would boost the confidence and learning experience of weaker students while enabling stronger students to take additional modules during their time at NP.

The focus of the initiative will continue to remain with the School of Engineering, and will not go polytechnic-wide as yet. Deputy Principal/ Engineering, Mr Lee Tuck Seng, 51, said that the idea was piloted with the School of Engineering because "it is a very big school".

He added, "We only started with one module. We intend to pilot more intensely in the next vacation with more modules in the School of Engineering."

From the experience, they will evaluate and fine-tune the programme, he said.

The ECE students who attended the three-week pilot had to go through lectures, tutorials and laboratory work amounting to almost 70 hours – the equivalent of a regular semester. They sat for the module's examination in the last week of December.

ECE lecturer for the pilot module, Mr Hang Kim Yam said, "First of all, I have a small group of students and because we see each other daily, at the end of it, I thought the rapport was very good."

He added that the good rapport was helpful in making the environment conducive.

Commenting on the students' response, Mr Hang said, "They liked the concept in the sense that we put focus on the module." He added that right learning conditions were essential in making the sessions interactive.

Hay Weilin, 21, first-year ECE student, said the Summer School had a good setting because of its effective communication.

"The class strength was small so the lecturer need not think about wasting time with everyone," he said.

Weilin felt that the students were given more attention in a small group situation like this, compared to bigger class sizes during the semester.

Kelvin Lim Yong Poo, 18, another first-year ECE student, agreed that the Summer School was effective because of the increased attention to the small group of students.

He said this meant "no one was left isolated and everyone had had a clear understanding of the course".

Most students who attended the Summer School felt that it freed time during the regular semester to catch up on their weaker subjects.

Kelvin said, "Students can revise on weaker subjects when they have one less module to cover during regular term."

Gunasekar s/o Sinnakannu, 28, first-year ECE student, said that during the Summer School lectures, "the learning environment was conducive, more flexible and more focused".

However, he added that the Summer School was also more stressful.

One topic or chapter would be covered each day, and by the fourth day, there would be a study break usually followed by a test, he explained.

Contrary to some students who found the Summer School stressful, Goh Shao Xiang, 18, a first-year ECE student, enjoyed the pilot run as he found it more relaxed and more "challenging as all of them were trying to do well".

The lectures, according to students interviewed, were more focused and helped individual students overcome doubts and answer queries.

The students attributed the success of the programme and their good results to the dedication of lecturers like Mr Hang.

Deputy Principal Mr Lee was encouraged by the response to the Summer School and was "very happy with the positive developments and results of the pilot run".

He added, "As we progress, I think this programme will help our students have a better learning opportunity and environment."

...Bridging the digital divide

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In the end though, one experience made all the effort worthwhile, she said.

"I was really upset when some parents were unhappy with us regarding certain stuff, and I really just wanted to run away and cry or something," she said.

"But after that, I spoke to one of the kids receiving the free computer and I actually felt upset again – that she was leaving already!"

According to Mr Yee, the specialist team put in a lot of effort in the large-scale project. They contacted various non-profit organisations, Community Development Councils and FSCs, as well as 170 secondary schools to find students who needed the computers.

As a result of their publicity efforts, The Computer Times, Today, The New Paper and

Lianhe Zaobao ran articles on the project. The resulting response from donors was so great that the team actually had to turn some people down.

"There were some families with only one computer. The effort of collecting one computer from one family in a corner of Singapore, it's just not justified," said Mr Yee. "We had only one transportation company to help us. Even my dad was saying, 'Rent a van for a day and I'll drive it.'"

He added, "We were frustrated because the sponsors did not respond, and we were limited in how far and how much we could help. We asked ISPs (Internet Service Providers) to provide free Internet access and Microsoft to provide software but were unsuccessful."

The computers came bundled with Windows 95.

The project was subsequently scaled down. Mr Yee said that the team had aimed for 2,000 computers.

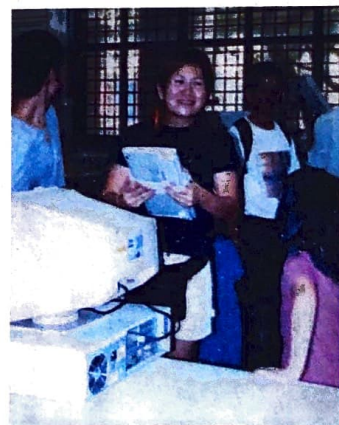
As a gauge, the Infocomm Development Authority collected about 6,200 computers in November 2001.

NP Principal Mr Chia Mia Chiang praised the efforts of the specialist team.

"It's most commendable that a student group is doing something that's worthy. We should be doing more of this sort of thing," he said. He was guest-of-honour for the event.

Mr Yee agreed. "It's probably good to have something to commemorate every Urbanwire year. I have a good and capable team. If next year's team is this good, then I might consider doing something [similar]."

And that can only be good news for needy students like Vicky.



NP VOLUNTEERS: Students and lecturers from the project team, Urbanwire and NP's Computer Club all chipped in to distribute the PCs at the event. (Picture: Koh Chien Yung)

project: open house

Evaluating Open House success

While the Open House is an annual event for NP to draw new students, AARON WONG and KEH CHIEN YUNG investigate how effective NP's efforts are.

Although this year's Open House on 20 to 22 February had activities like the Grand Olympiad, the Polymys and guided bus tours to attract potential students, the effectiveness of such efforts is difficult to determine.

The Open House, held annually, aims to attract mainly 'O' Level graduates to Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP).

"The Open House gives information to the students. It is a publicity tool," said Mrs Ang Beng Wah, NP's Director of Finance.

However, she said that the success of the Open House cannot be quantified. "It's hard to put it in numbers," she said.

For Ms Janice Quah, Director of the Corporate Communications (CorpComm) Office, success was ultimately bottomline-driven, which is the number of people who enrol in NP, she said.

Mrs Ang added that there could be many factors that contribute to the decision-making process when it comes to choosing an educational institution.

"Peer influence is quite great. Their peers in polytechnics play a big part. In neighbourhood schools, peers have more influence than teachers and parents.

"It's [also] more the activities that lead up to the Open House," she said. "Open House only impresses for half a day."

Communications & Marketing Officer from CorpComm, Ms Ida Kwan explained, "We have the Open House to give the general public, including prospective students, a glimpse of NP."

Some students like Joanie Aw Yong, 18, a second-year Marine & Offshore Technology student who was at NP's Open House in 2001, had a bad impression of the event

in her year. "It is all lies, it's not as interesting as they say," she said. "I asked questions and they said 'yes' and 'no', but no details."

Pang Gin Dee, 19, a second-year Electronic & Telecommunication Engineering (ETE) student who was a student ambassador for his division at this year's Open House, said that Open House was "mass propaganda".

However, he added that talking to people and giving out brochures at the Open House "is something we have to do" since the brochures can provide information and the choice "is still based on the individual".

Of the 40 students Tribune spoke to, 27 said that the Open House had little or no effect on their choice of polytechnic. 24 had decided to join NP whether they went to the Open House or not.

Campus Crusade for Christ, a Co-Curricular Activity (CCA) group in NP, conducted a survey among applicants to NP in this year's Joint Admissions Exercise (JAE), and found that the main reasons they chose NP were because of the distance, school environment, peers, personal interest or their results.

While Ms Kwan said that it is difficult to draw a comparison with previous NP Open Houses, Ms Quah said that this year's event was "packaged" with coordinated marketing efforts.

This year's NP course brochures, however, did not arrive on time for Open House.

In reply to Tribune's query, CorpComm said they gave out the NP prospectus instead.

Brochures printed in December 2001 were also given out.

"It's unfortunate we had to use the old ones. We had in mind that the new ones would be ready," said Mrs Tan Lay Har, Open House coordinator for the Building & Environment Division.

Mr Mirko Stoll, a Chemical Engineering lecturer and organiser of Open House activities for the School of Life Sciences & Chemical Technology (LSCT), noted that the entry requirements in the NP website and the new brochures, which only arrived during JAE on 1 March, had mistakes.

For example, the entry requirements published for the Diploma in Biotechnology were inaccurate, he said.

"Students are misled in the sense that they realise they may not qualify for Biotechnology even if they actually do. As a result, they might put a similar course in other polytechnics as their first choice instead," he said. "We were very frustrated by this mistake."

CorpComm has since rectified the mistakes by providing correction stickers and updating the NP website.

Mrs Ang added that the money invested in the brochures is not well spent in the sense that "some people cannot even remember receiving [them]".

Since the Open Houses of all polytechnics were held on the same days, schools had to decide which to visit on a first-come-first-served basis.

Ms Suhaily bte Supahan, 26, Career Guidance Coordinator of Jurongville Secondary School, suggested that the

polytechnics' Open Houses be held on staggered dates.

"Due to our limitations, we can only bring them to only one polytechnic. Our students cannot get to see everything," she said.

Another career guidance coordinator, Mr Patrick Low, 40, from Jurong Secondary School takes distance as a main consideration when deciding which polytechnic to introduce to their students.

About a quarter of their graduates last year joined NP, he said.

NP sent mailers to 32,000 'O' Level students in October last year, and again in the first week of February to invite them to the Open House.

NP also invited 166 secondary schools to the Open House but there was no way of tracking how many turned up, said Ms Kwan.

JAE visitor, Lim Chin Wei, 17, a Yuan Ching Secondary graduate, said, "[The mailers] only say about the success stories, but not the courses."

For one, the lure of freebies proved tempting. "I'm just here for the freebies only," said Faizal bin Ishak, 17, a Secondary 5 student from Shuqun Secondary, who was carrying three goodie bags.

To Biotechnology lecturer, Mr Gregory Chow, the Open House was a matter of pride. "If polytechnics don't have Open Houses, we will be in big trouble because it shows that we are not proud of our courses," he said.

Mr Chow believes that every experience at the Open House will have an impact as long as there was a personal touch to the event.

CorpComm conducted their own poll of more than 1,000 people present at the Open House, and found that the majority of the students felt that the Open House was a success, according to Ms Kwan. Some of the comments gathered from the survey praised the lecturers, student ambassadors and NP itself.

On its effectiveness however, Mdm Poon Yap Ching, Open House Coordinator for the Maths, Science & Computing Division, said, "Whether it is effective or not, nobody can tell because we just cannot get any statistics out of it."



In numbers

Places to fill

Secondary schools invited

Students invited by mailers

Mini-buses for guided tours

Number of booths

Diploma courses offered

Strength of NP Planning Co



Creative works on show

BY LIN LIZI
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Two innovative final-year projects by students from the Building & Environment (BE) Division, the security fire extinguisher and the umbrella dryer, were among some 60 projects exhibited in "Project Polymix" for Ngee Ann Polytechnic's (NP) Open House 2003.

The competition held along NP Orchard Road showcased projects done by School of Engineering and School of Life Sciences & Chemical Technology students.

The two BE projects had been featured in local Chinese newspaper, Sin Ming Daily News, which praised NP students for being creative.

The security fire extinguisher (shown top right) was designed specially to help the Housing and Development Board and the

Singapore Civil Defence Force combat increasing theft and vandalism rates of fire extinguishers, said Mr Ho Nee Fun, the project supervisor.

Tan Peng Chuan, 20, student leader for the project, explained, "Anyone who tries to open the fire extinguisher door will trigger the mechanism inside, which will then operate the camera (hidden behind a pin hole). This helps to capture the image of the thief."

Should an actual fire occur, the camera will be deactivated to conserve the film, he said.

Peng Chuan said that Open House visitors, mainly secondary school students, who visited their booth were impressed with their idea.

"I can tell from some of their faces that they were very shocked," he said. "One student even told me that though my project looks simple, he finds the mechanism involved very profound."

The Community Involvement Division of the Singapore Police Force has expressed

interest in the project, said Mr Ho. The Division has sent a representative to discuss the implementation of the device, but details cannot be confirmed at this stage.

"The most impressive part of the project is the students' ability to come out with something that is cost-effective and affordable," said Mr Ho. "Most people would think of using CCTV (closed circuit television) to capture the image. However, the CCTV equipment can cost over \$1,000."

The project costs about \$500, inclusive of the cost for a control unit that can be linked to several fire extinguishers and the snap shot camera. The design won the group first prize in the BE Division.

The second prize in BE went to the creators of the umbrella dryer. The idea came about after the group noted the problem of how dripping umbrellas on rainy days made the floors in shopping centres slippery.

The dryer takes only 30 seconds to dry an

umbrella up to 80 percent, ensuring that it is drip-free. Said Tan Poi Wah, 27, student leader of the project, any extracted water is transformed into water vapour and released through a channel called the louvre, located at the bottom of the machine.

The water dryer costs \$3,000. However, the cost can be reduced by almost 50 percent if the dryer goes into mass production, said Poi Wah.

Other projects included a PDA-controlled robot which won the Best Automation Project in the Mechanical Engineering Division, a motorised clothes hanger, a crane overload warning device and an energy-saving device for air-conditioners.

Groups that won the first prize in their Division or School are given a \$300 cash voucher and a certificate. Second and third-placed groups get \$200 and \$100 respectively and a certificate.



Secondary school students compete in Olympiad games

BY LENA IRYANTI
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This year's Open House saw Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) hosting the Grand Olympiad as a main event. The Schools of Engineering, Information Technology and Business & Accountancy hosted seven competitions for secondary school students.

Apart from the Grand Olympiad, campus radio station Radio Heatwave hosted a DJ competition as part of the School of Film & Media Studies' (FMS) Open House activities. The various schools prepared for the Grand Olympiad since last November.

It saw participants designing their Dream Robot,

constructing an organic battery and creating their own Racing Soda-Can Boat. These activities received overwhelming response from secondary school students who came for the final competition and award ceremony on 22 February, the last day of the Open House.

The event that received the best response was "Create Your Racing Soda-Can", hosted by the Marine & Offshore Technology (MOT) Division. Students had to build a miniature boat with a maximum of three aluminium soda-cans, with the fastest boat winning.

Thirty teams from 23 secondary schools were in the finals. Teams had to blow their boats across a panel of water, without using their hands.

The event aimed to break the engineering stereotype.

"Many people don't like engineering. They think it is a very hard subject

and not a very fun one too. Some people think engineers are not very creative people," said Mr Subrata Chanda, 41, MOT lecturer-in-charge.

He added that the students had to come up with a simple and creative boat that moves.

Some of the teams had trouble getting their boats to float to the finishing line while a few had their boats sinking at the start. The competition eventually saw Presbyterian High School students taking top spot.

"We took one month to prepare for this competition and made five prototypes before deciding on this design," said team leader David Jingga, 16, a Secondary Four student. Their physics teacher, Mr Joshua Sing brainstormed with the team and scrutinised their design in terms of shape and alignment.

"Apart from the physics aspect, I do in a way help them, in terms of the design concept, how they conceptualise... to help them go through the entire design phase," said Mr Sing, who was at the finals to lend his support.

The other event that drew crowds was the DJ competition, with six finalists vying for top spot. Participants had to send in a demo tape for Radio Heatwave's assessment.

After the selection, the finalists had to co-host live with the Radio Heatwave DJs in the NP studios.

"A DJ should be natural, with no put-ons and nothing fake," said Wesley Gunter, 22, third-year Mass Communication (MCM) student and Programme Director of Radio Heatwave, on the judging criteria.

He sat on the judging panel with FMS lecturers, Mr Rafael Oei and Mr Kwek Chin Ling, and Perfect 10's Assistant Programme Director Colin Gomez.

Perfect 10's controversial morning show DJs

Glenn Ong and Rod Monteiro hosted the finals at the Octagon (shown below). Supporters of three finalists, Valerie Lim Siew Hui of Crescent Girls' School, Raswinder Kaur of Tanjong Katong Girls' School and Liyana Khafiz of Pasir Ris Crest Secondary, had turned up in full force, overshadowing supporters of the other finalists, Dian Diyana, Adeline Lim and Nigel Ng.

Before the finals, the competitors agreed that they were nervous about facing the crowd and judges. Contestants were seen pacing at the side of the stage.

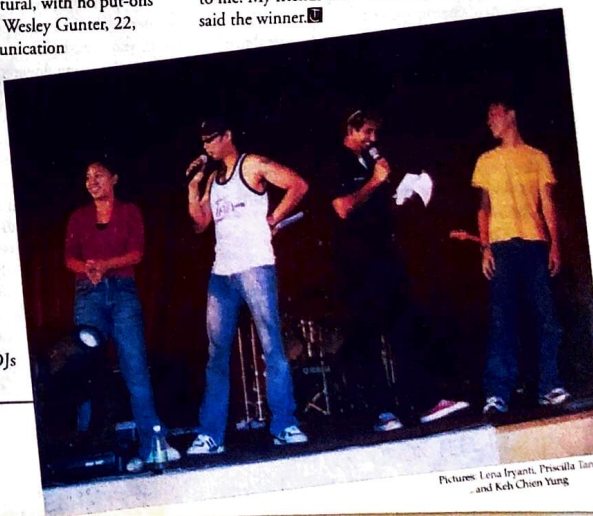
16-year-old Liyana Khafiz convinced the judges that she deserved to win. Being a school DJ, she displayed a high level of energy during her confident presentation. She is a producer-presenter at Rev It Up Radio, Pasir Ris Crest Secondary's radio station.

Raswinder and Valerie took second and third place respectively.

"As a DJ, you not only present on stage, but in the studios as well. Liyana possessed all the qualities of a DJ," said Mr Kwek, 44.

Liyana won the top prize of a mobile phone, a camera, CD hampers and a fortnightly guest slot on one of Radio Heatwave's programmes from March to April.

"I was so excited when I heard Glenn and Rod announcing my name. It is still very surreal to me. My friends didn't come here for nothing," said the winner.



Pictures: Lena Iryanti, Procella Tan and Keth Chen Yung

HOUSE

4,300
166
32,000
8
42
28
37

committee

We should be thankful



BY NOEL HIDALGO TAN
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Have you ever been told, as a child, to finish your food because people in [insert name-of-Third-World-country-stricken-with-famine here] are starving?

Have you, like me, wondered what good finishing your food would have done, since the afflicted peoples would still be starving?

I've had my share of "finish-your-food" lectures from my mother when I was young. Strangely enough, in her native Philippines, it is actually polite to leave a little food behind on your plate to tell the host, "Thank you, you have fed me well."

The point of finishing (or in my mother's culture, not finishing) the food on your plate was to have a sense of thankfulness for the food you had, and food in abundance at that.

I think we Singaporeans generally don't have that sense of thankfulness about the way

we live. Singaporeans are notorious for being complainers, largely because we all have comfortable living conditions – a roof over our heads, daily meals, and a decent education.

A few years ago, I was involved in a social service project and visited a few households which were considered "poor". I was quite perplexed by Singapore standards, that "poor" meant living in a HDB flat, owning a bed and fridge, and more surprisingly, a television!

Little wonder then that it's a big deal going overseas on community service projects, mission trips and other kinds of exposure to living conditions foreign to ours.

We really are quite insulated. Consider the following: 1.2 billion people in the world live on less than US\$1 a day and 12 million people die each year from lack of clean, drinking water. And the world in which 840 million people are malnourished is a sur-reality.

Our obliviousness to the situation can be easily seen in The Straits Times' story 'Junked Food' last November. It showed how local bakeries and fast food restaurants methodically throw away leftovers on a daily basis. Local bakery chain BreadTalk alone throws away 2,000 buns every night.

As a result, volunteer organisation Food From The Heart was set up to coordinate the collection of bread from these bakeries and delivering them to welfare homes.

Tribune is spearheading a volunteer drive on campus for the organisation. We hope you will sign up as a volunteer for this initiative and help distribute unsold bread from a local bakery in our community to people who need it. More importantly, I hope it is not merely the spirit of volunteerism that will touch you, but a spirit of connectedness.

The challenge for us is to be connected to the world – to be painfully aware that the suffering of another affects us in a profound way, and to act on the knowledge that our fortunate situation can be used to help another. If you look past boundaries of geography, society and economy, world hunger is a local problem. If we aren't connected, initiatives like Food From the Heart become just a logistical exercise.

To volunteer, e-mail breadrun@journalist.com with your name, contact number and which mornings you can help out on. Details about Food From the Heart are at www.foodheart.org.

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Touched by Cambodia

BY AMANDA KOH
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The night before I left for Cambodia, my fellow editor told me quite frankly,

"Nothing can prepare you for what you are going to see and experience." I understood what he meant the instant my transport turned out of the modern airport grounds into the weather-beaten roads of downtown Phnom Penh. Children were running around naked, landmine amputees were begging by the roadside, and within the city's red-light district were prostitutes that could be younger than me.

In December last year, two classmates and I, with our Book Writing & Publishing lecturer Mr Desmond Kon, photographer Mr Alan Lee, and Operation Hope Foundation (OHF) director Mr Robert Kee, went to Cambodia on a research and writing trip for our book 'The One Word'. The book was to raise funds for OHF, an organisation which does relief work in Cambodia, and to raise awareness about the challenges faced by the people of Cambodia.

The book, a brainchild of three 19-year-old Mass Communication students – Kimberly Mah, Rachel Fang and I – took us to Cambodia for two weeks, where we talked to prostitutes, street children, people with AIDS and landmine amputees, among others.

The first morning saw us up before dawn with what seemed like the rest of the city. Less than a kilometre away from our sponsored hotel was a queue of children, barefoot and in tattered clothes, in front of a bus. What looked like a run-of-the-mill school bus was actually a mobile drop-in centre with shower and basic medical facilities for poor children in the area, many of whom were street children.

The HISCHILD mobile drop-in centre treats up to 400 children a week in its eight sessions spanning Phnom Penh and neighbouring town Tak Mau. The volunteers take care of the children's hygiene and educate them about the perils of substance abuse and AIDS. They

get cleaned up in the shower and those with minor medical problems such as cuts are treated.

"There is no public transportation here in Cambodia, so it's difficult for the kids to travel to us. That's why we decided to go to them instead and settled on having a mobile drop-in centre to reach them," said HISCHILD Director Jung Young, a 42-year-old Korean lady who has lived there for the past seven years.

HISCHILD gets its funding from churches from Korea, Singapore, the United Kingdom and Malaysia. A Korean church donated the bus itself, which cost them US\$3,500 (S\$6,300) to refurbish.

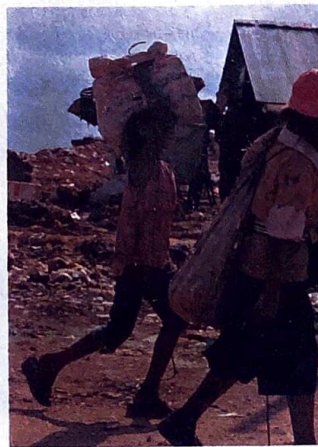
It is the dedication and selflessness of people like Jung Young and the doggedness and carefree resolve of the Cambodian people that touched me most during my trip. As a journalist-writer, I had to constantly remind myself to be objective and to keep my emotions in check. I succeeded, so much that I didn't even shed a tear at the sight of beggar with a naked, crying newborn in arms, no mean feat for someone who cried buckets at the airport before leaving.

In spite of this, a little girl of about ten literally touched me for the rest of my life. She was swinging, while standing on a rusty, donated swing. When she saw me watching, she smiled, part shy, part playful. I was mesmerised by her unabashed innocence and mischievousness, and waved. After a few minutes, she slowed the swing down and jumped off. She held onto the swing's metal handles, dusted the seat with her hands, making sure it was free of dust and sand, and gestured for me to get on. I sat down and she held onto my arm for what seemed like an eternity, stroking it with her rough hands, hands that should have been baby-soft. I spent the next half hour playing with my newfound friend and her friends. I never found out her name, because we could not understand each other's language, but the connection was so strong, there was no need for conversation.

The children live with their parents in run-down shelters along the perimeter of Phnom

Penh's rubbish dump, where they scavenge others' rubbish for items of value. They were so happy to have visitors and enjoyed making us feel welcome although we were intruding. Such is the nature of Cambodian hospitality. The little ones saw such wonder in a well-fed person, that they kept touching the flesh on my arms, a contrast to their skin and bones. A four-year-old with the same calloused hands continuously rubbed my moisturised ones and smiled at me. The smiles, though simple, were so genuine and heartfelt, that I felt tears welling up and tried my best to hold them back. It was this same simplicity that both touched and shamed me.

Through the trip and the people I met, I learnt humility – not only from the children, but also from a nomadic fisherman, a prostitute who had no other choice and a woman who contracted HIV from her husband who "went out to have fun". Nothing could have prepared me for what I saw, but my experiences in two weeks have taught me more than I had bargained for.



Alan Lee

Cambodia's Challenges

It seemed as though time stood still for the Cambodians. After a lifetime of political strife, including the Khmer Rouge regime, with the mass exodus to the countryside and the infamous Killing Fields, it seems like the country was waiting for its people to pick up from where they left off. The Khmer Rouge regime left the country at Year Zero, bringing its people back to agriculture, abolishing education and the most obvious trappings of civilisation. They also left behind an estimated ten million landmines around the country, one for each member of the population, causing innocents to lose limbs and lives.

As with every developing nation, Cambodia faces many challenges – social, political and economical. Trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty, many young Cambodians do not go to school or drop out early either because there are no schools or because they have no money. Provincial Cambodians earn as little as \$51.50 a day for a family of five.

Being poor, many men leave their farms during the dry season and go to the city for months on end. Mostly though, they bring the HIV virus back to their families. HIV is very prevalent, and proper health care is not an option for the poor. The poverty cycle also causes many girls to be dragged into the slavery of garment factories and the even more lucrative sex trade.

With developed countries recognising the need to help Cambodia break the cycle, Cambodia sees many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as OHF and HISCHILD setting up schools and orphanages, as well as shelters for women. They also organise relief efforts.

'The One Word' will be out in stores in May, and all proceeds from the sale of the book will go to OHF. Interested volunteers or donors can e-mail OHF at ohf@post1.com

Men's basketball second best again

BY UMA CHANDRAN
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Ngee Ann Polytechnic's (NP) men's basketball team missed out on becoming champion for the second time in the Institute-Varsity-Polytechnic (IVP) Games.

This time, NP missed being first by a heart-breaking six points in the last game. Despite the runner-up position, Pang Chin Hong, 24, captain of the team and second-year Electrical Engineering student said that the team had performed better than last year.

Defending champion and winner Nanyang Technological University (NTU) hosted the tournament from 20 January to 13 February, giving its team home ground advantage.

NP had put together a young and talented team with experienced players from the Under-18 Men's National team and the Combined Schools squad as well as Chin Hong from the National Men's team and other club players.

The last time NP won the championship was six years ago when they hosted the IVP. NP finished last in 2001 but had improved because

of their training and commitment.

Mr Thomas Tan, NP's basketball staff advisor, said that the men had "a lot of morale, team spirit and the spirit to fight". NP was also the only team to score 100 points in a match in the tournament, beating Singapore Polytechnic (SP) 100-74.

Chin Hong agreed that the team had very high morale after training together for a year. It aimed for the top three positions, and had a good chance to be champions after five consecutive wins.

Dubbed the "Titanic showdown between the top two men's teams in the league" by the official website of the IVP Basketball Championships 2002/2003, NP's final game against NTU was a thriller. Both teams played a fast-paced game and tried to earn points by counter-attacking on the break. But free throws and fouls kept disrupting the flow of the game and NP was left trying to gain momentum. The umpires also made a few questionable decisions that "held back" the team, said Chin Hong.

NTU led the match, maintaining a near-constant 10-point gap and winning 84-78.

Mr Neo Beng Siang, 36, NTU's coach, said his team saw NP and NUS as their "biggest challengers" before the competition. In the NP game, he said his team "started good in the first quarter. But towards the end, NP adapted to [their] game and caught up."

Mr Tan said if NP was not down 10 points in the first quarter of the final game, "we would have been the champs".

NTU was faster than NP, proving a disadvantage for NP who followed the university's pace and did not slow down to play their own game, said Mr Tan.

Leow Wee Lee, 24, team member and second-year Mechanical Engineering student felt that NP was weak in winning rebounds as they lacked tall players. "The whole team's performance is not mature enough," he said.

When asked if NP can go one better next year, Lee Wee Thye, 21, team member and third-year Marine & Offshore Technology student, said, "Definitely! I think we will get the champions." Likewise, Chin Hong said that even when four senior players leave, NP will "still have a strong team".

Bring it on, guys!

BY LIN MEITONG
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While some view cheerleading as a female sport, the men from Ngee Ann Polytechnic's (NP) Magnum Force would beg to differ.

Darryl Tay, 18, cheerleader and first-year Business Information Technology student, said, "It's a wrong concept for people who say that cheerleading is a sissy sport. I would ask them to try out the stunts. They take a lot of strength and agility."

For example, the stunt 'Elevators' requires three bases to support the flyer, usually a small-sized woman who stands on top of them. The bases include one man and two other bigger-sized women. Said Dion Eng, 17, cheerleader and first-year Electronic & Computer Engineering (ECE) student, "They have to tighten their bodies so as to fully support the flyer."

"Tighten" means that the bases must use their strength to stay completely still.

"Males are usually the base to support the females at the top because they are bigger-sized and have more strength to catch the flyers if they fall," said Denise Sum, 21, cheerleader and third-year Accountancy student.

Magnum Force has won a number of awards, including the National Cheerleading Championships (Open Category) in 2001 and 2002. The team also emerged first for the Police Cheer Competition and Dance Xtravaganza Competition in 2001, among other competitions.

Magnum Force has 40 members, including 12 men. "Guys just come because they're curious," said Sabrina Mustopo, 18, President of Magnum Force and second-year Biotechnology student.

Most NP students Tribune spoke to felt that having male cheerleaders is not a big deal. "It's

actually getting more and more common.

There's nothing special," said Moreen Shen, 19, third-year Information Technology (IT) student. Agreeing with her, Lyn Oh, 19, also a third-year IT student, said, "If there are no males, they [female cheerleaders] can't do a lot of stunts. They don't have enough strength."

This is true only to a certain extent, said Pauline Peh, 20, cheerleader and second-year Biomedical Science (BMS) student, "Certain stunts require more strength, so we would need the guys to hold up the base. We can do more advanced stunts with them."

"We would still be able to cope without the males but we can't perform the stunts as easily," said Sabrina.

Chia Yixiang, 19, first-year ECE student was unaware that Magnum Force had male cheerleaders. "Having males is quite good. They can cheer louder," he said.

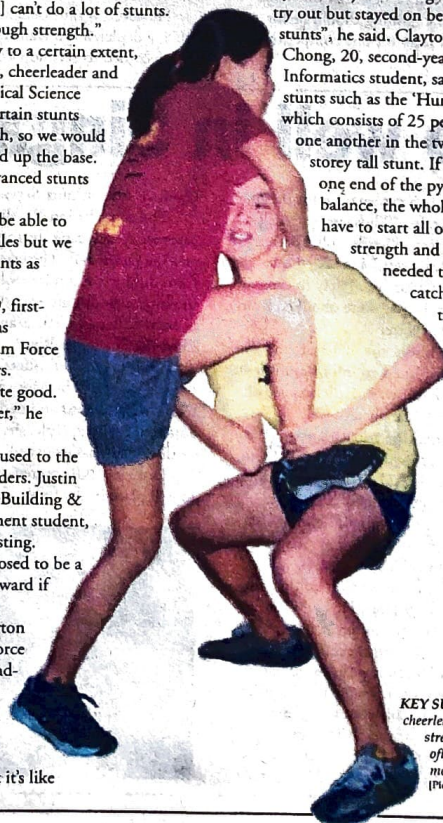
Others were not used to the idea of male cheerleaders. Justin Yeo, 21, second-year Building & Real Estate Management student, said, "It's quite disgusting. Cheerleading is supposed to be a female sport. It's awkward if guys do it."

In response, Clayton Low, 20, Magnum Force cheerleader and second-year BMS student, said, "This type of thinking is actually very narrow-minded. You never know what it's like

unless you try it."

Darryl agreed, "Cheerleading is a very interesting sport. You'll get an adrenaline rush from performing stunts."

Clayton first joined Magnum Force "just to try out but stayed on because I like the stunts", he said. Clayton and Jason Chong, 20, second-year Engineering Informatics student, said they enjoy stunts such as the 'Human Pyramid', which consists of 25 people supporting one another in the two-and-a-half storey tall stunt. If cheerleaders at one end of the pyramid lose their balance, the whole team would have to start all over. A lot of strength and coordination is needed to support and catch the flyers should they fall.



KEY SUPPORT: Male cheerleaders' size and strength mean that they often form the base for more advanced stunts. (Picture: Priscilla Tang)

Kaleidoscopic sounds

BY LENA IRYANTI
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Ngee Ann's Song Composing Club held its annual concert on 21 February, in conjunction with the NP Open House and NP's year-long 40th anniversary celebrations.

Aptly named Kaleidosound, the concert centred on the theme of colours. Lecture Theatre (LT) 26 was decorated with streams of coloured cloths, and the concert began with a multimedia presentation of colourful slides, which further emphasised the theme.

"The colours represent emotions... like how black represents depression, red is anger and so on," explained Chia Kay Yong, 19, the club's president and third-year student from the School of Business & Accountancy.

The performers were impressive with a lineup of 17 songs which included Mandarin, Malay and English tracks.

Lyrics and music were written and composed solely by members of the Song Composing Club, and the songs told stories of life and relationships, with each lyricist revealing their emotions in their works.

Cheng Sen Sky, 19-year-old Electronic & Computer Engineering student and secretary of the Song Composing Club, said that more than 300 tickets were sold.

On concert day, 360 people filled LT 26. The audience included talent scouts, representatives from Universal Music and Ocean Butterfly Production, NP students and NP Open House visitors.

The talent scouts and representatives from recording companies were there to song-source and talent-source, and some of the performers were approached to send in demos. Although there was no guarantee that performers' songs will be used, their songs will be considered by the talent scouts.

"Sometimes, they [recording companies] ask for demos... they will also give feedback on the concert," added Kay Yong. Some of the advice given by the recording companies was about stage transitions, lighting and microphone handling.

He added that the advice would be put into use when planning future concerts.

Kay Yong said preparations began last September and weekly rehearsals took place during the November-December semestral break. Preparations included conceptualisation, music selection and choosing the theme.

The club's president was very satisfied with the outcome of the concert in terms of turnout, support and progress of the club.

"Our membership has grown, there are different genres of musicians joining the club and we are a more united team working together," he said.

Some of the club's members are already recording their own Mandarin CD, which will be sent to recording companies.

The club will also be performing at the NP 40th anniversary dinner-and-dance at the end of March.

The concert was partly sponsored by the Lee Foundation and organised by more than 40 members of the six-year-old club. The club approached Lee Foundation for sponsorship to help cover production costs, which included stage design as well as sound crew, and printing costs for posters and tickets. These costs were also offset by ticket sales revenue. Each ticket was sold at \$5.

Injury-plagued rugby team fifth in IVP

BY MICHELLE GOH
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Ngee Ann Polytechnic's (NP) men's rugby team recorded one of their worst finishes in the Institute-Varsity-Polytechnic (IVP) competition, finishing fifth out of seven teams.

From the start of the tournament on 20 January, until the end a month later, seven of the NP first team suffered injuries severe enough to rule them out of important matches against traditional powerhouses National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

The team had been optimistic before the tournament and hoped for a top-three finish because it boasts a Singapore under-19 player as well as many experienced club players. It also has a new coach with ex-national player, Mr Tay Soo Chuan, who started coaching the squad in November 2002.

The coach believed that NP had a chance of beating NUS and NTU if they played to their full potential.

Mr Tay, 40, said, "When I saw the team, my aim is to finish second or third... our standard compared with the universities, I think we got a good fight."

Yap Boon Leong, 20, a third-year Electronic & Computer Engineering student and captain of the squad, had echoed his coach's view before the tournament started. "This year's squad quality and individual skill is very good and I

think we can finish second or third."

But the team's hopes were dashed even before the IVP started, due to the injuries of key players such as winger and Rugby Club president Jude Chan who tore his hamstring muscles and fullback Gordon Foo who suffered a fractured finger. The players took part in the IVP as the team was short of players.

Injuries aside, Gordon managed to put up some good performances by contributing four conversions, two penalties and a try to become NP's top point scorer in the IVP with 19 points.

At Temasek Polytechnic (TP), NP took on the host in the first match. NP started brightly when they scored the first try before being pinned back by TP and ending in a draw.

However, in the second match against arch rival Singapore Polytechnic (SP), NP suffered a blow as early as the fifth minute. Scrumhalf Eugene Ng was stretchered off and sent to hospital after an opposing player kicked him, leaving him with a split eyebrow that required seven stitches. At half time, winger Melvin Lee was taken off after tearing the meniscus of his left knee during a tackle.

NP not only lost 0-5, but also lost seven players to injury. They thus could not play the next match against heavyweight NTU.

Coach Tay felt that some injuries could have been avoided. "If the training period is longer, the players' fitness will be better so won't get injured easily. Rugby training should be for long-term, not just train for one competition," he said.



STRUGGLE ON THE FIELD: The Rhinos lost vital first-team players to injuries this season, dashing initial hopes for a top-three finish. (Picture: Uma Chandran)

As a result, NP fielded mostly reserves against NTU. Still, NP managed to score first and even led 10-5 at half time. However, the injury jinx continued to haunt NP as Singapore under-19 player Sam Tan had to be replaced in the second half after he dislocated his shoulder. The reserve players, some playing competitive rugby for the first time, were inexperienced. This showed in the second half as NP threw the game away to lose 10-20.

Reserve Chen Tangrui, 19, first-year Business Studies student who was playing in his first IVP, felt that he was "unprepared" and "inexperienced". He said, "Whenever you play against them (NTU and NUS), you feel pressurised because no other polytechnics has beaten them before."

The team finally got their long-awaited victory against Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP). Scrumhalf Eugene marked his return from the sidelines to first team action and scored a try as NP defeated NYP 15-8.

However, against defending champion NUS, a depleted NP team was beaten 24-0. NP then recorded its second victory 12-10 against

the combined ITE team who were first-time participants in the Rugby IVP. Gordon and Eugene were the try scorers in the match. At the tournament's end, Eugene was the top try scorer for NP with two tries despite missing two games.

Eugene, 19, a second-year Chemical Engineering student, was visibly disappointed with the team's results. He said, "For some of us, we tried our best but the results still weren't good due to some injuries to the team... we know we can do much better than that."

But Sam, 18, a second-year Multimedia Computing student playing in the second row, was not too disappointed that the team finished in the bottom half of the IVP. He said, "I think overall, it's okay except for the injuries and I think they (the players) are more injury-prone than unlucky."

Injuries notwithstanding, the team believes things can only get better. Jude, 24, a third-year Mass Communication student, said, "We must start training earlier. We need new blood and more committed players who will play for the team and not for themselves." ■

Blue Barrels do well in Singapore Raft Race

BY DAHLINAR JAMIL
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This year's Singapore River Raft Race saw 13 rafts from Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) participating, with 'The Motivators' clinching third place in the finals.

NP with their trademark blue barrels had joined a total of 140 rafts and some 3,000 people who attended the event held at the Singapore River on 16 February.

This year's event saw more rafts taking part compared to 100 last year. According to Mr Tan Chin Chan, the organiser from Singapore Polytechnic, "This time is a record breaker. The response is overwhelming."

17-year-old Kabilan Raj, a first-year Marine & Offshore Technology (MOT) student and member of raft team 'Butterfly Crusaders', said, "We used aluminium poles for the skeleton of the raft. We also used duct tape and screws."

The 'Butterfly Crusaders' won first place in one of the races but they did not make it to the finals as their timing was not as good as the other teams.

18 year-old Milton Tan, a first-year MOT student and member of the 'Butterfly

Crusaders' provided an explanation for the blue barrels used in the rafts. "Those were actually recycled from last year's. Besides, blue barrels are the best materials for a raft." He added that barrels float better and are less likely to capsize or sink. The materials used were obtained from the school's garbage centre.

According to Milton, the materials and the structure of the raft played an important role in winning. He said that it was partly because of the barrels that the NP teams did well.

Milton added that the participating NP students were not competing but were helping each other instead. He said, "If the other group requires something, we will help them out."

However, in the confusion of helping each other out, the groups mixed up the rafts.

19-year-old Tan Pei Wei, a second-year MOT student, said that it was due to the rain that the rafts were in disarray. He had been in charge of the rafts and the different groups.

First launched in 1989, the annual event was organised to celebrate the successful clean-up of the Singapore River. The main aim of the event is to raise funds; this year, more than \$140,000 was raised for the Society for the Physically Disabled, the Clementi Student Service Centre and the Singapore Polytechnic

Overseas Community Service Programme.

The competition was divided into different categories, including the most innovative raft and the fastest raft. The event also saw students from different secondary schools participating in the inter-school Raft Race. Colourful rafts made of bottles, bamboo sticks and junk materials filled the Singapore River.

With names like 'Summits', 'Butterfly Crusaders' and 'The Motivators', the student teams worked hard and had many rules to adhere to. For example, the raft's overall length must not surpass its overall breadth.

Last year, NP entered 10 rafts and won fourth place in the finals. This year, the students

were set on winning the title of 'fastest raft'. According to Tan Pei Wei, "80 percent of the students who took part are from Marine & Offshore Technology while the other 20 percent are students from Electronic & Telecommunication Engineering (ETE)."

It took the students two weeks to construct their rafts with some staying back after school to complete them.

"Even before the race, we were still screwing and pasting duct tape on the rafts," said Raj.

He added, "I don't think it's about the winning. It's all about working together as a team.... that's what's important." ■



ROW, ROW, ROW YOUR BOAT: NP, with their signature blue barrels, turned up with a flotilla of 13 rafts for the annual Singapore River Raft Race. (Picture: Michelle Goh)