

Singapore's eco and water champions

Be inspired to do your part

Our every little action can affect the quality of the environment we live in. Through this special feature, we share stories of how individuals and organisations have contributed, in their own ways, to the efforts to conserve our precious natural resources.

These eco and water champions are among the 19 who were honoured at the Singapore Environment and Water Awards Ceremony, held yesterday evening at the Istana, graced by President Tony Tan Keng Yam as the Guest-of-Honour.

- The three awards are:
- President's Award for the Environment, which is the highest environmental accolade in Singapore;
 - Watermark Award from the national water agency PUB; and
 - EcoFriend Awards from the National Environment Agency.

This ceremony coincided with the 40th anniversary of the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources. We hope their stories will inspire you to do your part for the environment, which the generations to come will continue to call home.



The EcoFriend Awards recognise individuals in various categories who, in their own ways, initiated ideas and volunteered personal time to actively contribute to the protection, promotion and enhancement of Singapore's clean and green environment.

During the selection process, the individual's contributions and achievements in the past two to five years are taken into account.

The five award categories comprise the private sector, public sector, non-government organisations and grassroots volunteers, educational institutions, and youth and students.

The awards are given out annually by the National Environment Agency. For 2012, there are 12 recipients.

It all starts from one person

Grassroots organisation volunteer Yee Kai Ling seeded several pro-environment initiatives in Hong Kah North



By Wong Sher Maine

IT WAS no easy task trying to get all the lights switched off in a public housing block at night.

But back in 2009, Ms Yee Kai Ling, a volunteer with a grassroots organisation in Hong Kah North, was determined to prove that Earth Hour – a pro-environmental international event that requires turning the lights off at a set time – can be observed in the heartlands.

Ms Yee says: "The challenge we had was that some people were concerned with security. But we managed to convince them, with the help of youth volunteers, to turn off the lights."

The corridor lights of two housing blocks were turned off for 50 minutes. Every year since, these residents have observed Earth Hour.

As a volunteer sitting on the Hong Kah North Community Club's Youth Executive Committee, she started an environmental arm six years ago. "We wanted to raise awareness about green issues like recycling, and create a garden in the community club," she says.

Her team piloted a junk mail recycling project which involved going door-to-door talking to residents. They also organised numerous environmental activities in the constituency like recycling used cooking oil and preventing dengue.

On whether she has truly made a difference in the habits and mindsets of the people in the area, she says: "I think increasingly, we are seeing that Hong Kah North residents are aware of environmental issues."

"I realised that if anything were to be done, it had to start from myself and I would gradually influence the people around me."

She orchestrates a green movement at Fuhua Primary

Primary school principal Fuziah Muhammad Taha is a role model to her charges

By Teh Joo Lin

AS A child, Ms Fuziah Muhammad Taha was thrilled when her parents took her to beaches and parks, where she could enjoy nature up close.

Decades on, as a principal, she has brought nature to her pupils – who she considers her "children" – by orchestrating a green movement at Fuhua Primary.

Ms Fuziah, who has headed the school in Jurong East since 2007, says: "Certainly, starting the green movement has made an impact on the pupils. I can see the enthusiasm as they exercise social responsibility and participate in the recycling efforts."

She has, with the help of her staff, woven the clean and green philosophy into the tapestry of student life. Not only do the 1,800 pupils learn about the environment, but they also practise conservation and even spread "green thinking" to other children at the orphanage the school adopted.



She says: "We also started to focus on environmental issues in project submissions for competitions. When we started to win awards, the school pride that was generated, together with the buzz created by involving pupils in Earth Day activities, paved the way for the school to move forward on its journey to go green."

Bigger projects followed as the green movement gained momentum. The construction of a man-made wetland to treat acidic rainwater marked a "significant milestone" for the school.

She adds: "I had the support of like-minded colleagues. They help me drive the green movement. I feel I am receiving the award as their representative."

"If every environmental champion can influence a few others, the circle will grow and soon we could have an environmentally friendly community."

Paving the way

The Girl Guides Singapore's environmental awareness is strong, thanks to its leader Tan Pau Cheng



By Shamilee Vellu

MS TAN Pau Cheng believes strongly in environmental issues and advocates early learning.

As commissioner of the Brownee Branch of Girl Guides Singapore (GGS), she leads girls as young as seven, known as brownies, to start learning about the environment.

"There's a lot we can do to make our homes and communities cleaner, greener places to live. By reducing the amount of resources we use, finding creative ways to recycle and re-use resources, and greening our environment, we can save energy and reduce the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere," she says.

Ms Tan has initiated and organised numerous nationwide environmental activities to spread awareness to all brownies and guides, or adult leaders.

To encourage and motivate more brownies and guides to actively practise 3Rs knowledge in their daily lives, Ms Tan worked closely with the National Environment Agency (NEA) to introduce recycling components to the test clause of the Chief Commissioner's Badge Award.

She also has plans in the pipeline to further spread the message of environmental sustainability. There will be two new badges for brownies, guides and young adults that will help them learn about environment and food, as well as biodiversity issues.

The efforts to inculcate environmental awareness and responsibility in GGS' young charges are paying off. Quia Ng of St Anthony's Primary School represented GGS in the NEA Recycling Outreach Programme and found it an enlightening experience.

"Encouraging the public to recycle and collecting recyclables from them have made this a memorable experience for me. Ms Tan has made me realise we can make a difference through our simple ordinary actions," the 12-year-old says.

Charged with vitality

Student Quek Bai Feng is so motivated to further the green cause that he co-founded an online portal to engage the young on this

By Mike Lee

WHEN Mr Quek Bai Feng was in Secondary 3, a friend introduced him to the documentary film An Inconvenient Truth, which is about former United States vice-president Al Gore's educational campaign on the world's environmental challenges.

Realising the significant impact global warming already had and would have on the world, Mr Quek researched further on the topic and began his eco journey.

Together with the same friend who introduced him to An Inconvenient Truth, he initiated Operation ReVitalise, which engaged primary school students on green issues via an interactive portal featuring information about Singapore's biodiversity.

Says Mr Quek: "Education needs to start from young. I know it sounds clichéd, but it is true. Beyond knowing about our environment and its various issues, our future leaders need to be morally educated. They need to be principled in their actions and take ownership for our shared space."



Mr Quek is currently the vice-chairperson of the Keep Singapore Beautiful Movement Youth Committee, which mobilises communities in ground-up activities to clean up and green the island.

He says: "Most of us nowadays have a short attention span in peripheral matters of life. Coupled with the reiteration of similar green messages year after year, it creates a numbing effect that leads to sidelining these issues in our daily lives."

He adds: "It's easy to get caught up with the different facets of your life. There needs to be a time when you sit down, reflect and realise your true interests, commit to them and stay true to yourself."

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