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Two Make A Bigger **And Better One**

The prospect of the Singapore Bank Officers' Association and the Singapore Bank Employees' Union merging to become one is now firmly on the cards. In that event, the new entity will overnight become Singapore's largest financial services union.

At the end of SBOA's 10th Triennial Convention of the General Council on 22 April 2010, delegates gave the green light for the union to work out the details. SBEU delegates had similarly said yes in March. The next step is for the unions to have an official vote to get the wheels in motion.

In his address at the convention, NTUC Secretary-General Lim Swee Say applauded the bold and right move of the union leaders: "The financial services of today are very different from the financial services of five, 10 years ago. We are very sure that under the Economic Strategies Committee directions, it will continue to transform, continue to change very rapidly."

He said that while the financial services sector offers tremendous opportunities and growth potential, it is critical to keep abreast of rapid changes in the industry and the world in general: "As somebody once said: `When the pace of change outside is faster than the pace of change inside, then the end is in sight'.

"The point is that if we know that things outside are changing very fast, we had better make sure that the pace of change inside is as fast if not faster than the pace of change outside. If not, we will be left behind and then the end will be in sight."

NTUC Secretary-General Lim Swee Say receives a token of appreciation from SBOA President William Goh at the conference.

SG Lim recognised that mergers of unions can be tough in that some union leaders may lose their positions and delegates need to mobilise their members' support: "As the Labour Movement of Singapore, we are very fortunate to have many selfless union leaders. Leaders who are prepared to put the interest of the unions, put the interest of the Labour Movement ahead of their individual interests. As a result, they are prepared to look at the big picture and are prepared to look far. They are prepared to what you call `cut small to create big'." He stressed that this process must continue.

Noting that many Labour Movement unions are involved with financial services, he said: "Basically, it presents us an opportunity now to really take a hard look and ask ourselves in what way can we consolidate our expertise and resources so that we can support the growth of the financial services in Singapore better. So that we can serve the workers in this sector better. That really is the challenge facing us.

"I am happy to say that many of our union leaders related to this sector recognise that having a louder voice, having a more proactive approach, having more influence on the future development of the financial services sector in Singapore in fact is the best way for us to strengthen our effectiveness in serving the interests of the workers."

SG Lim gave the assurance of NTUC's full support in the event of merger with the formation of a pro-tem committee to be chaired by NTUC Assistant Secretary-General Ong Ye Kung with NTUC Industrial Relations Director Cham Hui Fong as Deputy Chair. They will be advised by NTUC Union Centric Director Ong Chin Ang.

SG Lim added: "This merger is a very important one and on the part of the Labour Movement, we look forward to a bigger, better and faster union after the merger so that together we can ensure that we can support a faster and more successful growth of the financial sector in Singapore. And at the same time ensuring that this successful growth of the financial sector in Singapore will likewise be an inclusive growth for all workers in this sector."

By
Marcus Lin

More Help Under One Roof

Page 4

Speeding Up Connectivity For Productivity

A Voice For U

By
Dr Kwong Yuk Wah
NTUC Chief Information Office/
Competency Director, IT

The Economic Strategies Committee recommends a productivity-driven growth for Singapore. Historically, Information Communications Technology (ICT or IT) has been a key enabler in Singapore's economic development as early as 1979 when a National Computerisation Committee, chaired by the then Deputy Prime Minister Dr Tony Tan, was formed to look into the strategic exploitation of IT for the entire nation.

This initiative was in line with the economic development strategies then to encourage automation, mechanisation and computerisation. Directed at effective use of IT, a five-year National Computerisation Plan focused on automating working functions and reducing paper work so as to increase the productivity.

The ICT journey went on and beyond automating and integrating traditional manual processes. In 1986, the National IT Plan was formulated and incorporated as Chapter 17 of the Economic Committee's report entitled "The Singapore Economy: New Direction".

IT enabled connectivity in several key sectors. One of these sectors is the TradeNet for the trade community. This world's first nation-wide electronic data interchange (EDI) network has reduced the trade clearance from 2-7 days to just 10 seconds. Importers and exporters just submit one document instead of over 30 documents. It was evident that ICT was a strategic tool to give Singapore a competitive advantage.

A new breakthrough happened in the 90s. Sectoral-wide transformation took place and major national information technology infrastructure was laid from 1992 to 1999. Unveiled in September 1991, the IT2000 Masterplan was to transform Singapore into an intelligent island and to position Singapore as a global hub for businesses, services and transportation.

In 1998, the Singapore's Electronic Commerce Master Plan was launched by the then Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in the midst of the difficult economic conditions globally. Building on Singapore's traditional strengths as a commerce and transportation hub, the Master Plan aimed to encourage the pervasive use of electronic commerce in Singapore to improve productivity and competitiveness of Singapore businesses, and to make Singapore an electronic hub for the region and beyond. To-date, Singapore is the nation with the advanced ICT infrastructure, ICT savvy businesses and a well connected society.

We in the Labour Movement also recognised ICT as a force multiplier to increase productivity and to build a strong community of communities. The UPortal was mooted in July 2008. This is a vision of innovation using ICT to strengthen our "U". UPortal transforms the way that we communicate with each other in the Labour Movement. It is the gateway to all our stakeholders and the platform for electronic services. UPortal will be going live progressively the next six months. Stay tuned, and give us your valuable feedback.

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Dr Lam Pin Min chatting with a young student.

My First Skool In Sengkang To Boost Parents' Engagement

By
Nicolette Yeo

From today, parents of NTUC First Campus Co-operative Limited's My First Skool at Block 302B Anchorvale Link can look forward to playing a more active role in their pre-schoolers' lives.

This is the second My First Skool to be set up in Sengkang West Division but the first Community Partnership Programme between the Ang Mo Kio Group Representative Constituency and NTUC First Campus.

At its launch on 13 April 2010, Member of Parliament for Ang Mo Kio GRC Dr Lam Pin Min disclosed that the CPP will include a Joint Liaison and Advisory Committee to "engage parents and encourage their involvement in centre life."

He elaborated: "As Honorary Education Advisor to the centre, I am looking forward to working closely with the team at the centre to explore ways of enhancing family ties within the community through various programmes and activities. I will also be working with
the committee to develop strong community partnerships that respond to the unique needs and challenges of our neighbourhood. We will also facilitate active participation and contribution to current and future partnership arrangements, all with the aim of supporting the development of early childhood education in our community which will ultimately benefit the children."

Mrs Adeline Tan, My First Skool's General Manager, added: "We believe that developing the child requires the collaborative efforts of teacher, parent, and the community. By collaborating with parents, we ensure continuity for children's learning. By collaborating with our community, we enable our children to enjoy greater access to a variety of resources in the centre's vicinity."

Dr Lam also took the time to tour the centre and observe the children in action. He even got the chance to join in the Rhythmn Harmony activity where he completed a piece of artwork. All in all, Dr Lam was "pleased" with the CPP because it presented "an excellent opportunity for grassroots leaders to sit in and play a more pro-active role in early childhood education".

The launch also saw the presentation of a special pre-school bursary to Mr and Mrs Kwek Boon Heng for their daughter, Sheryl Kwek, a first for the CPP. The bursary was awarded under the NTUC First Campus' Bright Horizon Fund.

Dr Lam said: "I am glad that NTUC First Campus has such a fund. There are national programmes in place to help lower income families, and this fund complements them by going one step beyond. It caters to an in-between group of parents who do not meet the criteria of the national level programmes but deserve to be helped."

Keeping Pace With Change

Speaking at the Singapore Bank Officers' Association's 10th Triennial Convention of the General Council on 22 April 2010, NTUC Secretary-General Lim Swee Say said:

"The critical success factor for the Labour Movement is our ability to ensure that the union leadership, the labour leadership will remain effective. To make sure that our union structures will remain relevant we have to keep up with the pace of time, with the pace of change.

"Because if you are not able to keep up with the pace of change, progress with time, then one day we will find ourselves being left behind. Indeed, this is the situation for many labour movements in the world. All over the world union membership is on the decline as a percentage of the workforce. So the penetration rate is on the decline. Somehow their labour movements have not kept up with the pace of change.

"In Singapore, we have been and will continue to keep up with this pace of change. Just for illustration, in the last five years alone we have seen many changes taking place in the Labour Movement, taking place in the structure of the unions."

The newly elected SBOA Executive Council and trustees.

Healthcare Sector

"2006 was an important year. First we saw the merger of the National University Hospital Employees Union into the Health Corporation of Singapore Staff Union. The two healthcare unions came together, merged and formed a new union known as Healthcare Services Employees Union. At that point in time, when the two unions came together, together they had 14,191 members. Since then, under the collective leadership in HSEU the union has been growing and in the last five years membership base has grown to 18,000. From 14,191 to 18,113 in the last five years is a growth of 27 per cent.

"So it is a clear sign that if we put our act together, achieve economies of scale, become even more effective, there is potential for growth.

Education Sector

"Another example is education. We are all aware that the education sector in Singapore is changing very rapidly. In 2006, three major unions in Singapore decided to come together to contribute towards the formation of a new union.

"The Singapore Manual and Mercantile Workers' Union, Amalgamated Union of Public Employees and Singapore Industrial and Services Employees Union actually gave up some of their union membership, those that are related to education services, so that collectively they could form a new union known as Education Services Union with 4,402 members for a start.

"Then later on, the Kindergarten and Childcare Centres' Staff Union decided to merge with ESU so that there will be a seamless education programme from pre-school to tertiary. So with that, the 4,402 from ESU and the 6,771 from KCCSU came together. So we had a union of more than 11,000 members. Since then, we have now grown to almost 15,000 members, a growth of about 30 per cent.

"The education cluster and the healthcare clusters are clear and strong illustrations that if we pull our resources, pull our expertise together, in fact, we can grow the economy. If the healthcare sector can grow in Singapore, if the education sector can grow in Singapore, we can grow with them. We can grow with them by providing better value added services to the growth of the industry."

Taxi Associations

"Another area of development will be the taxi associations. We have for quite a number of years now had six taxi associations under the leadership of NTUC Assistant Secretary-General Seng Han Thong. Over the last few months, they have been talking about merger. Hopefully, sometime this year, we will see the six taxi associations being merged into a National Taxi Association. For taxi drivers, there are many issues not just about their work, but also their planning for retirement and healthcare.

Taxi drivers are actually self-employed workers so how do we ensure that they save enough for today, save enough for the future."

"It will be a merger of equals. We have to sort out many issues. Administrative, legal, staffing, membership transfer, assets, it's a whole lot of issues. That will be our role as a protem committee.

"The outside industry is moving very quickly and over the years you see that both SBEU and SBOA represent more or less rank-and-file workers and junior executives. But outside the industry is going upstream with more and more value added services, more and more highly qualified professionals.

"In NTUC, we have to reach out to these workers as well. With a merged entity, we are moving with the times, moving with the developments of the industry and better able to expand our base and strengthen the unity of the membership.

"We have to take care of every single leader that is affected. See how we can get everybody to look at the big picture, make some individual sacrifices if need be, and for the greater good of the NTUC and the Labour Movement."

NTUC Assistant Secretary-General Ong Ye Kung

SBOA Members of the Executive Council for the term 2010 to 2013

The following were elected to the Executive Council of the Singapore Bank Officers' Association for a term of three years from 2010 to 2013.

President	Mr William Goh Boon Kwang
First Vice President	Mr Freddie Tan Keng Chye
Second Vice President	Mr Palaniappan s/o P.M.
General Secretary	Mr Wee Soon Guan
Deputy General Secretary	Mr Phua Tien Tim
Assistant General Secretary	Madam S. Nirmala
Treasurer	Mr Charles Siow Eu Sen
Assistant Treasurer	Mr Patrick Ong Keng Huat
Chairman of Women's Committee	Madam Alice Huang Oi Lee
Executive Councillors	Mr Fong Ah Har
	Madam Christine Lee Tok Mui
	Madam Christine Ang Bee Keng
	Mr Tan Yen Pau
	Mr Loganathan s/o Pasupthy
	Madam Theresa Teo Bee Hong
	Madam Jennifer Phee May San
	Mr Mohamed Salim

"Given the changing landscape in the banking industry as well as the kind of challenges facing both SBOA and SBEU, a merger does offer distinct advantages. We plan to hold another conference later on, possibly before the end of the year, for the delegates to vote on the merger."

SBOA General Secretary Wee Soon Guan

"If we merge with SBOA we can maximise our resources, our manpower and create an entity that will look after the interests of all categories of bank workers, not just the rank-and-file. We will have to grow and our union will be stronger and bigger and we will have a bigger say."

SBEU President Max Lim

More Hope And Help **Under One Roof**

Contract and casual workers like Mr Ong Lye Ann can expect services like career guidance as well as assistance to tap on Workfare Income Supplement and Workfare Training Scheme at the one stop centre – Centre for Contract and Casual Workers.

By
Naseema Banu Maideen

The next time Mr Ong Lye Ann, 61, a contract building custodian, decides to approach the Labour Movement for skills upgrading, he will also have doors opened for moving to a different industry with better prospects. It's all housed under one roof at the Centre for Contract and Casual Workers - C3W.

C3W will be located at NTUC's e2i (Employment and Employability Institute). This one-stop centre will see the culmination of efforts of NTUC Unit for Contract and Casual Workers and NTUC's e2i in bettering the lives of contract and casual workers like Mr Ong.

Mr Ong has gained the ability to speak simple English after attending the Workplace Literacy and Numeracy course recommended by NTUC UCCW last year. Previously, a cleaner with ISS Group, he has since rose to the ranks of a building custodian, earning about $250 more now. He has also diligently attended workshops on employment rights by NTUC UCCW and is now more aware of his rights as a contract worker.

"NTUC UCCW has provided opportunities for upgrading myself through more courses and I am also now more confident to take up new challenges," he said. NTUC UCCW has more than 9,000 low-wage contract and casual workers in its fold. It has engaged about 17,000 workers through its outreach programmes over the last four years. With the set up of the C3W, it aims to reach out to another 20,000 workers this year.

Said Director for UCCW Zainudin Nordin: "These outreach efforts will help our workers to continue to be more resilient and more employable. This centre will be a point of convergence of services for our workers who can expect career guidance, assistance to tap on Workfare Income Supplement and Workfare Training Scheme as well as recreational and social activities. We will also work with NTUC's e2i to implement the Employment Intervention Programme."

Through EIP, workers will benefit from a structured journey of career upgrading lined up for them, which will give them access to profiling by employability coaches, attend training programmes like Attitude, Skills and Knowledge workshops, Employability Skills System courses, vocational courses and eventually attend industry previews and job fairs as recommended.

C3W will also roll out a new Personal Achievement Card to help record the skills, qualifications, experience, training and certificates attained by these contract and casual workers. As the centre guides them to improve their literacy skills, many of them may initially still not be competent to write their own resumes. The PAC will aid employers verify the workers' competence and structure appropriate training programmes for them. For the worker, this card will serve as personal career development record book.

C3W will be located at NTUC's e2i at 141, Redhill Road, Block B, #03-08, from June this year. Contract and casual workers can contact NTUC UCCW at 6213 8399 to benefit from their services.

Doubling Efforts For Multiple Benefits

"With a one-stop centre where workers can now approach us directly, our outreach efforts to employers and workers on the ground will continue. It is important for us to engage employees at their workplaces, interact with the employers and better understand real work environments. This strategy will play a role in reaching out to our target sectors this year such as cleaning, food and beverage, logistics and landscape."

Zainudin Nordin, Director for NTUC Unit for Contract and Casual Workers

Gains In All Ways

"Co-locating C3W within NTUC's e2i will mean that we can look at the worker's situation holistically. C3W will promote best sourcing, educate the worker on his rights and benefits under Singapore employment law and refer him for training and upgrading. He will also have the option to go through our career coaching process and find a new job in a new sector."

Ong Ye Kung, NTUC Assistant Secretary-General and Chairman for NTUC's e2i (Employment and Employability Institute)

Unnoticed But Not Forgotten

By
Spencer Teng
Senior Consultant, NTUC Unit for Contract and Casual Workers

My question since schooling days has been answered today: "Who goes to school everyday even during school holidays?" Yes - Cleaners. The contract cleaners in the schools are one of the lowest paid cleaners in the industry. They earn about $650 per month on average. The majority of them are above 50 years old and are lowly educated with merely primary six education.

Most of them speak their own native languages and can hardly even communicate in simple English. However, they take pride in their work and their responsibilities are no less than anybody else. During the H1N1 outbreak period, the cleaners built up a tough resistance to ensure that the students were protected from the virus. These cleaners are perplexed by the benefits of Singapore's social structures such as Central Provident Fund and Workfare Income Supplement Scheme. Some of the cleaners are not even aware that they are protected by the Employment Act in Singapore.

NTUC's Unit for Contract and Casual Workers, together with the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Manpower and CPF Board organised

workshops over five days from 5 to 9 April 2010, educating about 750 contract cleaners from schools on their employment rights, CPF entitlement, Workfare Income Supplement Scheme and the benefits of UCCW.

These workshops were held after the overwhelming response from earlier sessions organised in 2009, which benefitted over 800 contract cleaners. NTUC's UCCW is working together with MOE to engage another 2,000 cleaners this year. The cleaners can also take the opportunity to sign up as UCCW member to enjoy the benefits.

Madam Pitchammal d/o Thiagaras, 53, said: "I don't know who my boss is. I just receive my pay every month from my supervisor, that's all." These concerns are genuine. Their employers change so frequently that the cleaners do not even know who their current employer is. They do not receive bonuses and they do not understand why their pay is so low for so many years. Some of them even get a wage cut after working for five years - a syndrome that is instigated by price undercutting.

In order to allow the contract cleaners to fully understand the details, the workshops were conducted in their native languages at different sessions. As part of efforts on responsible outsourcing, MOE provided an excellent platform for the contract cleaners to voice out their concerns and questions.

"Now that I know more about the benefits of UCCW, I will want to spread this information back to the cleaners working at my school and encourage them to join," said Madam Karlinah Sahadan, 40, a contract cleaner from Clean Solutions Private Limited.

NTUC's UCCW continues to work closely together with our tripartite partners to educate and outreach to more contract workers. It will also continue to beef up the benefits and continue to promote Best Sourcing Initiatives in order to improve the condition of the contract cleaners.

Working And Praying In Harmony

A Chinese altar (left) and a Hindu shrine (right) standing alongside each other in Cameron Singapore

By
Muneerah Bee Mohamed Iqbal
Photos By **Vincent Nghai**

While it is common for companies to celebrate festivities in the office, Cameron Singapore Pte Ltd took one step further in accommodating the daily religious needs of their employees. A branch of Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering Employees' Union, Cameron Singapore designated special areas for Hindu, Muslim and Chinese worshippers to carry out their daily rituals within the company's premises.

Tucked away among serene greenery behind a workshop, a Chinese altar and a Hindu shrine stand side by side. Accompanied by the scent of incense and joss sticks, the area brings tranquillity to worshippers. To cater to the Muslim workers there, a Muslim prayer room is also available indoors, equipped with an ablution area. These facilities were built in 2008 with the help of the union and the support of the management. The workers at Cameron Singapore also contributed to the construction of these places of worship.

The projects rooted from a makeshift Chinese altar in the workshop consisting of a small table. As the site expanded and went through some upgrading construction over the years, the altar was relocated about three times. Senior manufacturing specialist Jason Lim, 51, recalled: "We requested management for a permanent location and now we don't have to be concerned about whether the altar needs to be moved during a plant expansion or re-layout. The workers here are also happy about it."

Right about the same time, the Hindu shrine was also constructed beside the altar, the first official place of worship for Hindus in the company. 50-year-old branch leader and material handler Veeramani s/o S Krishnappa said: "It's very convenient for us to do our prayers here at the shrine. I also personally feel that we've received a lot of blessings since the shrine was built. For example, the company is doing very well and we are getting good increments and bonus."

The construction of the Muslim prayer room also means less hassle for devotees as the nearest mosque in Taman Jurong is half an hour away. Now they can heed the call to prayer at their own time. Mohammed Bin Noor, 52, painter said: "We are all working on shifts here so we come in a few of us at a time to perform our prayers. We are happy and thankful that the union and the management gave us full support for the prayer room requirement. It may be a small room but it means a lot to us."

These worship facilities granted the workers peace of mind while they are at work. Being able to practise their faith at work also enhances their roles and commitments as employees.

Mr Veeramani explained: "We can do our prayers before we start work and it helps us to be more confident doing our jobs and that everything will go on very smoothly."

Cameron Singapore also sees this as a value add to their workers' careers at the company and it also contributes to a more satisfied and happier workforce. Cameron Director of Operations, Asia-Pacific & Middle East, Norman Butter said: "As a caring employer interested in the overall wellbeing of our employees, we wish to ensure we respect the cultures and beliefs of ALL our employees. Religious and spiritual beliefs plays a large part in many of the lives of our employees and as this is one way to assist with staff motivation and retention. We seek to find ways to have our employees being contented and happy to work at Cameron whilst enjoying a fulfilling career."

SMEEU Executive Secretary Lim Chin Siew expressed that the company's gesture speak volumes of their commitment to the workers welfare: "SMEEU applauds Cameron Singapore's respect for our workers' religious affiliations by building the shrines and providing a place of worship for them. This shows that management walks the talk when they say that they care for the workers' well being."

A 'Musollah' (Muslim prayer room) for worshippers to fulfil their daily religious commitments

Migrant Workers Learn Local Culture And First Aid

By **Raymond Goh**
Industrial Relations Officer, Building Construction and Timber Industries Employees' Union

The Social Integration Programme, run by NTUC LearningHub Private Limited and the Migrant Workers Centre, has successfully reached out to the construction industry on 18 April 2010 after making its debut in the hotel industry. Building Construction and Timber Industries Employees' Union collaborated with Shimizu Corporation Singapore to introduce the programme to 40 foreign workers.

It initially seemed difficult for this programme to take off in the labour intensive construction industry. However, BATU had secured the active participation of Shimizu Corporation and other unionised construction companies were also keen.

BATU, with support from the MWC and NTUC LearningHub, repackaged the SIP into a programme with an underlying theme of `Work Safely, Live Happily'. The programme kicked off a half-day Singapore tour, which saw the participants visit iconic sites like Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam. This was to introduce them to the history and culture of their country of residence for the tenure of their stint in Singapore.

Next, they were taught essential first aid skills and procedures to follow in an emergency, like using a first aid box, procedures for helping unconscious colleagues and proper wound dressing. This new programme is also part of BATU's larger initiative of enhancing the Workplace Safety and Health capabilities of the All CAN – All Collars, All Ages and All Nationalities- workforce in BATU-represented industries.

The management partner saw great value in the programme as the use of both experiential and reinforced learning were successful in achieving the objectives of social integration and giving the participants a working knowledge of first aid in case of emergencies.

Said Mr Ong Yong Seng, Shimizu Corporation's Senior Manager (Workplace, Safety and Health): "Employees' welfare is always one of the top priorities for Shimizu. The content of the whole programme brings many benefits to our foreign employees, from fostering greater teamwork to making learning of essential practical skills more fun and effective. It is always exciting working with BATU as they certainly understand the needs of our workforce. The close partnership between Shimizu and BATU has benefited many of our employees in the past and present."

The company took an active role in working closely with BATU to tailor this SIP run for their participants. It provided suitable classroom venues and valuable inputs in developing the programme contents, which helped align the first aid training syllabus to worksite requirements.

Migrant workers from Shimizu enjoyed a good taste of the different flavours of local culture through the Social Integration Programme.

Reaching Out To More Sectors

"A feature of the SIP is that it is flexible enough to be customised to different nationalities and industry sectors. In addition, the Migrant Workers Centre and NTUC LearningHub have also been able to make the programme more robust and effective for our migrant brothers following feedback from the inaugural session with FDAWU. The MWC is greatly encouraged by the response of participants and the partnership of the unions in championing social integration for migrant workers, and will be looking to expand the SIP's outreach through similar collaborations moving forward."

Mr Bernard Menon, Centre Manager, Migrant Worker Centre

Value-Adding In Many Folds

"Hopefully, with the addition of practical application skills, there will be wider take up of the programme from the construction industry. Apart from using this programme to integrate foreign workers into Singapore society, the programme can also be useful in enhancing learning and building greater cohesion in the workplace".

Nasordin Mohd Hashim, BATU President

Cameron Empowers Workers

Empowerment to workers is the key to the success of Cameron (Singapore) Pte Ltd, a leading provider of flow equipment products, systems and services to worldwide oil, gas and process industries.

This was disclosed to NTUC Secretary-General Lim Swee Say during a visit by a NTUC team to the company on 15 April 2010 to discuss Cheaper Better Faster and productivity strategies with management and the Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering Employees' Union.

Said Ashley Kok who is Cameron's Director, Manufacturing - Asia Pacific and Middle East: "Empowerment is really the theme. It used to be that the operators never dared to speak up. They always thought that they shouldn't tell bad news. With this leadership transformation, the leaders from the ranks of the folks from the floor really empathise and understand the importance to flag and raise issues. Because if you don't, then how do you address the problem, how do you make sure the improvements take place. So people are empowered and as a result the people around them start to see that their voices are being heard."

When it was said that an organisation cannot be world class without empowering people, SG Lim added: "If you don't empower the workers, they will become the bottleneck. When that happens then they will become the bottleneck of all bottlenecks."

Through use of Lean Six Sigma, high employee involvement and collaborative efforts between union and management, over two hundred improvement projects have been completed resulting in cost savings, safer work procedures and increased efficiency. Cameron also practices HSSE (Health Safety Security and Environment).

SG Lim explained the rationale behind incentivising companies to be early adopters: "If we can help 50, 100, 200 companies to run ahead, then the faster they run the faster the rest of the industry will catch up. So that is our intention."

Public Sector Must Stay No. 1

From left: AUPE General Secretary Teo Yock Ngee, NTUC Secretary-General Lim Swee Say, AUPE President Chattukutty Nair Balan and AUPE General Treasurer Ricky Cheng Fook Kwong.

By **Marcus Lin**

During a visit on 22 April 2010, NTUC Secretary-General Lim Swee Say thanked the Amalgamated Union of Public Employees for its contributions during the downturn and looked forward to its continuing contributions during the upturn.

In a dialogue with AUPE exco members, branch chairmen and secretaries, SG Lim said that AUPE contributes to pro-business, pro-worker initiatives: "In the public sector, you have a very important role to play because, firstly, you provide the infrastructure for the private sector to grow. Secondly, you create the overall climate for businesses to grow.

"But most importantly, the public sector of Singapore is today certainly one of the best in the world. And you as union leaders will have to make sure that this public sector of Singapore will remain number one for a long time to come.

"For Singapore to succeed, we need the Government and public sector to be number one. We need our businesses to be number one. We need the Labour Movement to be number one.

"For you as union leaders, you need to be number one on two counts. As civil servants you need to be number one. As union leaders you also need to be number one. So there is a double challenge."

SG Lim also explained the rationale behind his recent call for the CPF contribution rate to be restored: "Some of you will remember that in the year 2003, the CPF contribution rate was cut from 36 per cent to 33 per cent. So employers contribution dropped from 16 per cent to 13 per cent in 2003. The CPF contribution rate was recalibrated from 40 per cent to 30 to 36 per cent. In other words, the CPF contribution rate was reduced to 30 to 36 per cent depending on how the economy performs.

"After the cut to 33 per cent in 2003, it took us four years until 2007 when the climate was right to restore the CPF partially to 34.5 per cent. Since 2007, we had global inflation in 2008 and global recession in 2009. So it was not possible to restore the CPF rate further.

"So in 2008 we kept quiet. In 2009 we kept quiet. In 2010 I was actually planning to keep quiet also and just wait for the economy to recover. And then what happened? The first thing that happened was unemployment dropped from 2.5 per cent to 2.1 per cent. Last year it went up from 2.5 per cent to 3.3 per cent, to 3.4 per cent and then dropped to 2.5 per cent.

"It caught me by surprise that the turnaround was a lot stronger than expected. Then the first quarter economic results came out. Quarter on quarter GDP growth of 32.1 per cent. Year on year GDP growth of 13.1 per cent. Outlook for the rest of the year - 7 to 9 per cent. Unemployment dropped to 2.1 per cent. GDP growth strong. Outlook 7 to 9 per cent. At a time like this, as a Labour Movement if you don't ask for restoration then when do you ask?

"So I floated the idea. The reason I say I floated the idea is because CPF restoration is not a subject for negotiation. It is not for the Government, the unions and employers to sit down and negotiate. CPF restoration is a decision to be taken by the Government.

"As a Labour Movement, we can voice and float the idea given the overall climate. After I said it, Singapore National Employers Federation President Stephen Lee responded that he was caught by surprise. He said he understood why but restoration must be cautious and gradual.

"So basically, we expressed some desire. Employers expressed their concern. Now, the ball is in the court of the Government. Given the call of the Labour Movement, given the concerns expressed by employers, now the Government will have to decide, firstly, to restore or not to restore. Secondly, if it is to restore, is it 0.5 per cent, one per cent or 1.5 per cent because from 34.5 per cent to 36 per cent is 1.5 per cent. Thirdly, whatever is the percentage, when do we restore? Is it now, is it middle of the year, is it end of the year.

"Let me add another point why we are in a hurry to restore. Since 2007 after we restored the CPF rate from 33 to 34.5 per cent, we launched CPF LIFE. There are still a sizeable number of Singaporeans who don't have enough savings in their CPF account. As a result, some of them don't qualify for CPF LIFE."

Mature Workers Shine At NTUC ElderCare

By
Vanessa Teo
Pictures by **Alvin Toh**

64-years-old Madam Patricia Ang (left)

A Unique Disposition

"Passion, dedication to the job and the ability to inspire are what most organisations view as important values, and I am proud to say that all these values can be found in the mature workers. They are not motivated by the next promotion, the next sale they clinch, but rather, are more focused in finding meaning and fulfillment in their jobs. To NTUC ElderCare, we see this as an opportunity and value them as an emerging asset."

Lim Sia Hoe, NTUC ElderCare Co-operative Limited General Manager

"As long as I am active, capable and am able to do a job well, I will continue to work. I believe that our body and mind needs to be utilised properly, as like a machine, if you don't utilise it properly, it will just break down," said NTUC ElderCare Co-operative Limited Nurse Co-ordinator, Tan Chiew Kim.

And thus, she is actively employed with NTUC ElderCare, tasked to set up a Clinical Component in the six NTUC ElderCare centres across Singapore gradually, where the elderly folks can now have a medical avenue to turn to within the centre. NTUC ElderCare did not mind her being 63-years-old, but chose to hire her and tap on her 40 years of nursing experience.

"It is great to be given the opportunity to challenge myself, to keep myself healthy and active, and at the same time contribute back to society. NTUC Eldercare has given me a lot of flexibility to run the Clinical Component in each centre and it's a wonderful experience for me. By employing mature workers, NTUC ElderCare has set an excellent precedent by acknowledging that a mature worker's years of experience and knowledge actually add value to the organisation," said Madam Tan.

During a week, Madam Tan will rotate around NTUC ElderCares' six centres, reviewing elderly folks' health as well as training centre staff to ensure they are competent in taking care of the folks, and making sure they know how to react during an emergency. And it's through such instances that Madam Tan's experience plays a pivotal role.

63-years-old Madam Tan Chiew Kim (right)

"Most of our staff do not have a medical background, therefore, by imparting my experience and skills to them, they are then better equipped to help the elderly folks when I am not around. Being a mature worker myself, I am able to empathise well with the folks in their attitudes and feelings," said Madam Tan.

64-year-old NTUC ElderCare Homecare Case Manager Patricia Ang, a newly hired staff, also benefitted from NTUC ElderCare's age-friendly employment practices. Tapping on her prior experience as a nurse as well, Madam Ang's job duty is to assess clients' physical, psychological and social conditions, and after which recommend care suggestions according to their needs. Having been given a chance to return to employment, Madam Ang feels great in being employed once again and is grateful to NTUC ElderCare for the chance.

"NTUC ElderCare did not discriminate against us because of our age or add limitations to our job scope, thus allowing us to contribute much more based on our experience. I thank them for adding fulfillment to my life, and giving me a chance to keep myself mentally alert," said Madam Ang.

Anyone Can Be A Manager, But Not An Engineer!

UWEEI Launches Professional Community For PMEs

By
Roshini Mohan Krishnan

With almost 16,000 of it 53,500 members consisting of Professionals, Managers and Executives (PMEs) and 60 per cent of these PMEs comprising of engineers, the launch of the United Workers of Electronic and Electrical Industries Engineering Professional Community could not have been timelier.

The soft launch of the professional community, held during a professional development seminar for engineers on 10 April 2010 at One Marina Boulevard, was graced by UWEEI Executive Secretary and NTUC Deputy Secretary General Halimah Yacob. "The employment landscape of the electronics sector has changed tremendously and there are now more engineers and professionals that are employed as companies continue to upscale their activities. This is a trend that is likely to continue and will remain relevant to the needs of this sector," said DSG Halimah on the motivations behind this UWEEI initiative.

Through this professional community, UWEEI aims to strengthen its outreach efforts and build a long lasting relationship with PMEs, be it members or non-members. By providing programmes such as professional development seminars, career counselling as well as social networking opportunities, the community aims to attract more PMEs from the booming electronics sector. "This is an excellent example of the Labour Movement making an effort to continue being relevant in this ever changing economy," added DSG Halimah.

Guest speaker for the seminar, Ms Nanz Chong, former founder of the `One.99' chain of shops and current bestselling author, shed light how she overcame the failure of her business venture and continued to remain resilient in the face of adversity during her talk entitled `Entrepreneurship and the Art of Leadership.' On encouraging the audience to embrace change and take on leadership positions where possible, Ms Chong said: "We should not be afraid of failure. Failure is a state of mind that we need to overcome."

The dialogue session that took place thereafter proved to be a lively affair with panellists DSG Halimah, Ms Chong and Mr Toh Ming Hon, Director of Manufacturing at Energizer, encouraging engineers to continue to upgrade themselves and invest in career development and to make full use of their specialised skills. And as one forum participant commented amid loud cheers: "Anyone can be manager, but not an engineer."

For Mr Thong Chee Meng, 35, a member of the management staff from Numonyx Pte Ltd, this event provided a great opportunity for him to interact with likeminded individuals and to learn about what more was in store for members of the community. He said: "This is an excellent platform for PMEs to get to know one another and create a support system. I am looking forward to more seminars and workshops to enrich myself. It also gives me the opportunity to keep in contact with fellow union members and take part in future union led initiatives."

Power Charging Union Leaders

OTC Institute Assistant Director Roy Ng at the Group Induction Programme in 2009.

By
Vanessa Teo

What supposedly was bad news to him actually took a turn for the better and became a door of opportunity instead. When Ong Teng Cheong Labour Leadership Institute Assistant Director Roy Ng was retrenched in 2002, he did not give up but went knocking on the doors of OTC Institute as he knew he had a passion in training then.

"I was from the electronics industry doing engineering work, and was given a chance by my previous company to go into training. And that was how it all began. I fell in love with training. I chose OTC Institute because I know that this is not a job where I am only educating people, but when I share my knowledge with the union leaders it actually has a multiplying effect on the ground and benefits much more people," said Mr Ng.

And so Mr Ng joined OTC Institute in January 2003. At OTC Institute, Mr Ng heads the Leadership Development Unit, rolling out leadership development initiatives for union leaders. "Every year, we look at the Labour Movement's work plans and initiatives and constantly ask ourselves, 'How can we add value to these initiatives, how can we create stronger awareness and appreciation among our union leaders of these directions?' This is important because only with the full support from all our union leaders can these initiatives be successfully implemented . We also visit our unions regularly to understand what their needs are in terms of leadership development. We then consolidate their inputs together, and determine the type of programme we can design and roll out for our union leaders. At OTC Institute, we are prepared to bend backwards to meet all the leadership developmental needs of the unions," said Mr Ng.

With union leaders taking up more roles today, Mr Ng also faces a new set of challenge, that is, to maximise the learning experience for union leaders. He shared: "The role of a union leader is very multi-faceted today. Besides representing their members in collective bargaining and looking after their welfare, they still have to help workers upgrade themselves, ensure their long term employability, work with the company on job re-design, re-employment and improve productivity . Thus our challenge is to come up with programmes in a timely manner to equip our union leaders to do all these roles effectively. Many of them hold full-time jobs, and have limited time, so to get them to attend courses physically may be tough."

In order to overcome this challenge, Mr Ng together with OTC Institute will then have to ride on the 'Cheaper Better Faster' wave. "We are going into e-learning and also trying various means of information dissemination. Be it creating easily readable bite-sized booklets or other means, we want to create a channel where our union leaders can keep themselves updated all the time," said Mr Ng.

Having spent seven years with the Labour Movement, Mr Ng is sure that he made the right decision to join this family seven years ago. He said: "I am very amazed at how the Singapore Labour Movement is able to keep reinventing itself to help workers despite having an employment landscape that changes at an equally fast pace too. So each time when we meet a crisis, the Labour Movement is always able to roll out something to help our workers. And I am proud to say that this is the unique criteria of our Labour Movement."

Housing Quality Education

By
Muneerah Bee Mohamed Iqbal

Since February 2010, the Singapore Teachers' Union stands at 583 Serangoon Road.

Andrew Sim

The new Singapore Teachers' Union office is more than just to house the operational needs of running the union. The successful relocation is the very essence of the Labour Movement's rally to be Cheaper Better Faster.

Consisting of two adjacent units of secondary conservation shop houses, the new office along Serangoon Road is more accessible than its previous address. Maintenance cost at the previous compound was high as most of the recreational facilities there were under-utilised. By moving to premises that are suitable for their needs, the union can make the most of its resources.

"A key challenge is to continue our efforts in strengthening our services, benefits and outreach as an executive union. As a union, we need to remain relevant to the needs of our members, both young and old. The office move in a way is an effort of STU to practise being CBF by delivering more value at a better location with more accessible outreach," said STU General Secretary Edwin Lye.

STU also believes in being CBF by developing a quality education that is highly valued, innovative and flexible in catering to different needs of the schools. The union also extended help to its members in their jobscope through Educare Co-operative Limited. The co-operative of the STU deploys paraprofessional educators, such as Teacher Assistants, to work with and aid teachers in schools. The services that Educare provide enhance the work process and productivity of teachers.

Needless to say, education is a key contributor to increasing productivity and cultivating an innovative economy in Singapore. STU members play an important role in sowing the seeds of future innovation and productivity leaders for the next generation. Mr Lye said: "Adding value to the productivity movement, our teachers have direct roles in imparting their academic knowledge and life skills to students. Beyond that, more importantly for the journey to become real and sustainable, it is also about inspiring our new generation to adopt a can-do spirit of innovation, creativity and life-long learning."

STU

Formed in 1946, the Singapore Teachers' Union currently has over 12,000 members. The union continues to engage the Ministry of Education to provide feedback and suggestions in an effort to develop a new generation team of educators, an effective performance appraisal system and other initiatives to foster a creative and holistic learning environment.

Managing The Art Of Wearing Many Hats

By
Muneerah Bee Mohamed Iqbal

Women are their own worst enemies.

At a dialogue and sharing session `Discovering the Gems in every woman' on 8 April 2010, this sentiment was echoed by NTUC Deputy Secretary-General and NTUC Women's Development Secretariat Director Halimah Yacob and guest speaker Ms Leslie Traub, President and Chief Executive Officer of Cook Ross Inc.

The session, organised by NTUC WDS, took about 60 women on a journey to manage their multiple roles better. With more than 25 years of experience in gender programmes, as well as diversity, inclusion, cultural competence and change management initiatives, Ms Traub engaged the participants in recognising the importance of putting themselves first and encouraged them to reflect on the expectations they set for themselves. She also gave tips on balancing these expectations and shared a poem to inspire and empower the participants.

At the panel discussion, DSG Halimah also brought up the issue of Asian women who are culturally modest and tend to downplay their capabilities and, for some, this may cost them when it comes to succeeding at the workplace. Ms Traub advocated for women to have a network and support system. She advised: "Find someone who is able to see your gift and encourage you in subtle ways in showing what you are capable of doing. Or find a friend so you can support each other in showcasing your gifts."

As more than half of the participants were union leaders, DSG Halimah pointed out that sessions like these help them to enhance their roles in serving in the unions. "By going through this programme, it helps the sisters to better understand themselves and to be better in performing their roles, including the role of a union leader," she said.

Housing and Development Board Staff Union Acting Assistant General Secretary Cheung Mei Ling found the session to be an enriching and beneficial experience. She shared: "Today's session helps me reflect on myself.

Ms Leslie Traub (standing) engaging participants to share their thoughts on managing expectations.

Time Out For Better Well-Being

"I was really pleased that so many women came and I hope that they walk away with something of use for them, particularly making sure that they take some time to nurture themselves and their well-being."

Leslie Traub, Cook Ross Inc. President and Chief Executive Officer

Beyond The Caregiver Role

"Women today perform multiple roles; it's no longer a single role of being a caregiver and they are finding that juggling these multiple roles is a tremendous strain on them. So today's session provides a very useful opportunity to ensure greater empowerment of women and for them to learn to better manage these roles."

Halimah Yacob, NTUC Deputy Secretary-General and NTUC Women's Development Secretariat Director

The poem 'Woman In The Glass' is a very good portrayal of why we, as women, should really take care of ourselves. It will also help me relate to my female union members if they ask me for advice. I can share the poem to help them see that if they treat themselves better, they will feel good and they can do better at work and with their families."

A Day At Work For The Little Ones

17 Children Visit Singapore's First Steel Mill

By **Roshini Mohan Krishnan**

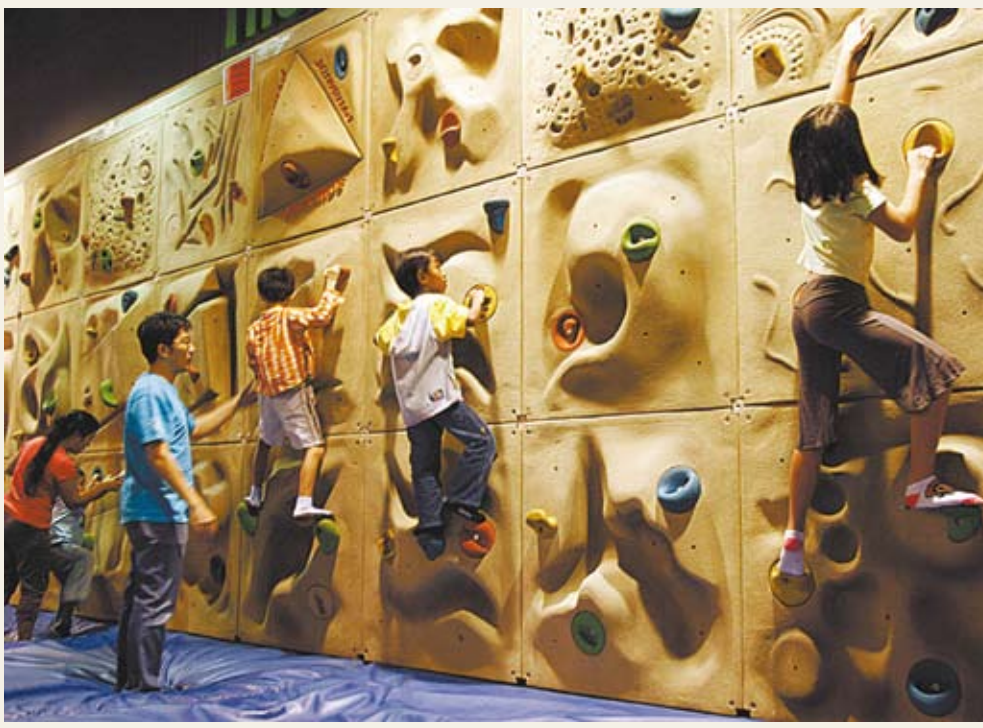
It was an eye-opening experience for 17 children of employees from NatSteel Holdings as they toured Singapore's only steel mill and learnt more about their parents' place of work during the Little Ones@ Work programme held on 17 March 2010. The programme, an initiative by NTUC Women's Development Secretariat, aims to encourage companies to allow their employees to take their children to work at least once a year.

The young visitors were first treated to a skit that illustrated the process of steel making as well as a sharing session by their parents on their respective job scopes. They were then taken on a tour around the steel mill and even managed to get up close to the by-products at different stages. Mr Lee Lian Chye, Senior Technician, whose daughter attended the programme said: "She was very happy to get a chance to visit the plant. She has never been to my place of work before and I am happy that she has got this opportunity to learn more about the plant and steel making."

This was the first event of its kind for NatSteel Holdings and it was organised in collaboration with the NatSteel Employees' Union. "This is a great programme for everyone. Children get the opportunity to see first hand the type of work that their parents do on an everyday basis. We hope that this will be an ongoing programme and we want to encourage more parents to take part in it," said Mr Chew Chee Leong, President of NatSteel Employees' Union.

When queried on NatSteel's motivations on taking part in this initiative, Ms Liu Fang Joo, Chief HR Officer and Senior Vice President of Corporate Communications said: "NatSteel sees this initiative as a very good opportunity to bring the children up close to the mill and identify with what their parents do. This also helps the children better appreciate their working parents. Furthermore, as an employer of choice, this programme is an extension of our employees' welfare."

T.G.I.Family Night!



By **Billie Anne Lyou,**
Senior Specialist, U Family

Fridays have a special beat to it, colleagues in the office tend to smile more, and you can sometimes hear exuberant shouts of 'T.G.I.F' from someone three desks away. While the colleagues who are single would chat about shopping and meeting up with friends at some chic new hangout later, parents would usually go home to their children and stay at home for the night.

"We usually just spend Friday nights at home, with the children doing their homework after dinner. We will definitely like the chance to go out and do something interesting together!" says Mr. Eric Lim, UWEEI member.

Hearing our members' needs for 'something interesting' to do on a Friday night for the family, U Family planned a series of events that are happening on Friday nights. The series, called 'Family Night Out' will have exciting concepts like pyjamas parties, after-dinner play time in eXplorerkid, all to entice parents to have a family night out, making Friday nights their family nights.

Mr Edmund Tay, together with other parents who attended the first Family Night Out on 26 March 2010 , enjoyed a relaxing time picking up useful parenting tips from Mr. Lau Tat Chuan, Director of Centre for Fathering.

He wrote on his blog, 'Ed Unloaded' (http://www.edunloaded.com/: "I'm always looking to learn from other parents…I think that Mr. Lau was a very sincere speaker, and his stories about how he shouted at his eldest kid too much really displayed honesty and openness.

His children? They zoomed right into eXplorerkid's sprawling indoor play area right away!

Sounds like a fun night out for your family? Come dressed in your favourite pyjamas (yes, parents can dress up too!) and join in a pyjamas party during the next Family Night Out on 14 May 2010. Sign up at www.ufamily.org.sg/familynight.

Romancing U

"We talk every day, every night. If we have a moment, no matter how tired we are, we go on a date."

Michelle Obama on her relationship with her husband, President of the United States of America.

By **Billie Anne Lyou,**
Senior Specialist, U Family

What is the hottest topic among parents? Make a guess.

Their children, of course. Even when mummy and daddy have some time alone together, inevitably the topic of how their child is doing will somehow enter into their conversation. U Family understands that parents are naturally concern about their children and sometimes lack the energy to plan for abit of romance. Hence, since two years ago, U Family has made it a point to plan unique couples-only events to inspire parents to strengthen their marriages through enjoying activities together.

On 27 March 2010, together with Orchid Country Club and Marriage Central, U Family held our first-ever overnight retreat at the tranquil settings of Orchid Country Club, away from their children and from the stresses of city life.

'Romancing U – The Love Retreat' saw more than 70 members getting intimacy tips, creating their own mocktails, enjoying canapes and a candle lit dinner.

Romance was definitely in the air that night, as seen in a surprise move by one couple:

"This pair of love birds caught our attention. The wife dedicated a love song to her husband and they waltz gracefully though the dance floor. It was her husband's birthday and she had pre-arranged for a surprise cake to be brought out for him after dinner. He knelt down and presented her with a lovely bouquet of flowers. She placed her wrinkled hands on him and they were locked in an embrace, oblivious of our prying eyes. Nope! They are not newly weds! An elderly couple as old as my parents," wrote Ms Janice Chuah, blogger of 'the hunnybunz blog' (http://hunnybunz.janicechuah.com/)

Other couples are just happy to have a quiet night together, Mr Sng Yew Heng, CIEU member, says: "This is our first time at an event for couples. We seldom spend time alone so this gives a chance to have a date together, away from our kids for awhile."

For another husband-wife date, U Family will be organising a movie night for couples in September. Keep a lookout for details at www.ufamily.org.sg