More teens are taking on holiday jobs to pay for coveted designer items

Carolyn Quek

UNDERGRADUATE Cheryl Lee, 20, gives tuition six hours a week while juggling her own studies. She has a goal in mind: a $1,500 oak-coloured Mulberry handbag.

The second-year economics student at the National University of Singapore has been saving about $300 of the $520 she earns every month for the bag, and plans to buy it from the British luxury brand's online site next year.

Cheryl is building up a collection of brand-name bags. Last year, with her earnings as a tutor, she bought a $600 bag from Coach, an American luxury brand. She also receives a monthly allowance of $450 from her parents.

"After working so hard for one year, I need something to reward myself with and to motivate myself further," she tells The Straits Times.

She adds: "I believe an expensive bag and shoes finish off any outfit perfectly. If you wear something simple, but you have a nice bag or a nice pair of shoes, it jazzes the outfit up."

Nelson Lee, 18, who has been putting in long hours at various jobs over the school holidays, also splurges on expensive designer items with the money he earns. He gets a $300 monthly allowance from his parents, but they give him less — $250 — when he works.

In the past two years, the second-year student at Temasek Polytechnic's School of Interactive Media Design has been a freelance graphic designer and sales executive at a makeover studio. With the $500 or so he earned each month, he bought a 20GB Apple iPod, which cost $589 a year ago.

Last month, he forked out $300 on an olive-green Agnes B Homme sling bag with the $2,400 he earned during the September and October break working at Guess.

More and more teens now have their eye on luxuries and choose to work for them.

They give tuition or work as sales assistants during the school holidays, earning the extra cash to splurge on designer items and expensive electronic equipment like digital cameras and MP3 players.

Nelson says that working during the school holidays to earn that spare bit of cash is "better than asking my parents for money".

"If I want to get something, I should earn it," he says.

His sentiments are shared by most of the eight teens The Straits Times interviewed. All worked during their holidays and some into term time.

Larre Guo, 18, says: "It is better this way because if I bought what I wanted with the money my parents gave me, I would not treasure it as much as if I had earned it through my own effort."

He is waiting for his O-level results, and worked as a waiter in a Chinese restaurant at Suntec City during the March and June holiday breaks in 2005, earning $900 in total. Back then, he was getting $150 a month from his parents.

With that money, he bought a Sony PlayStation 2. He is now looking for a job to help pay for driving lessons.

Nelson's classmate Roy Lim, 20, wants to supplement his $360 monthly allowance. For two years, he worked during school breaks at a Club 21 boutique, earning $1,000 to $1,500 a month. He left that in April, moving on to freelance graphic design work and part-time photography for a makeover studio.

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